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the 1990s, the incidence of *S. flexneri* has increased in the United Kingdom [10]. In the United States, *S. flexneri* has been reported to be the most common serotype of *Shigella* isolated from children with shigellosis [11].

There is a paucity of data on the epidemiology of *S. flexneri* in the United Kingdom. In the 1980s, *S. flexneri* was the most commonly isolated *Shigella* serotype from patients with shigellosis in the United Kingdom [12]. In the 1990s, *S. flexneri* was the most commonly isolated *Shigella* serotype from patients with shigellosis in the United Kingdom [13]. In the 1990s, *S. flexneri* was the most commonly isolated *Shigella* serotype from patients with shigellosis in the United Kingdom [14]. In the 1990s, *S. flexneri* was the most commonly isolated *Shigella* serotype from patients with shigellosis in the United Kingdom [15].

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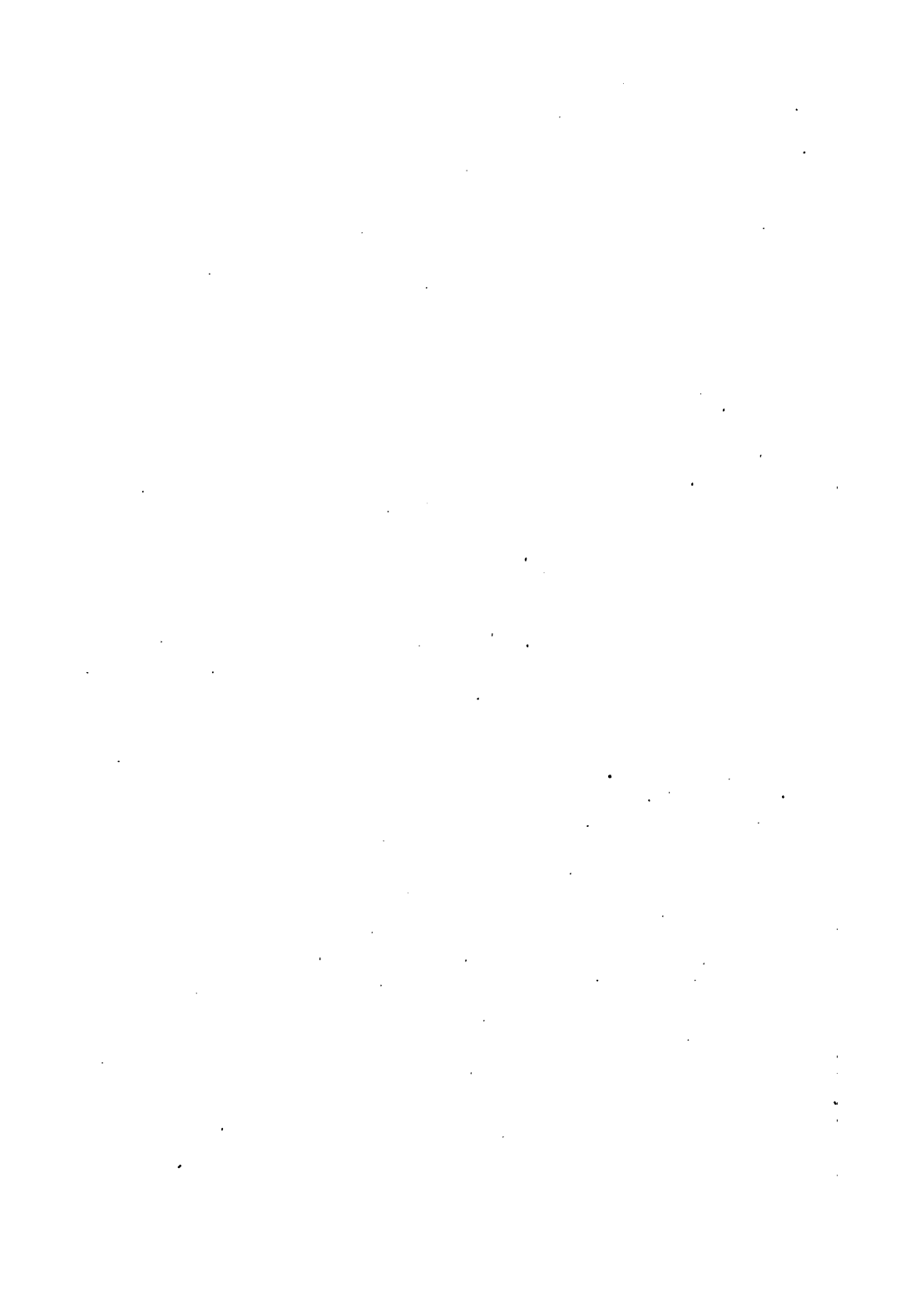
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**A MODERN GREEK HEROINE.**

**VOL. II.**



# A MODERN GREEK HEROINE

Μπουρμπαχοκατζουλή με τὴ μακρὲ πλεξούδα,  
ἀπὸ πολέμ' ἀντρίστικα, κὴ ἄς ἦτο κοπελοῦδα.

Bourbachokátzonli with the long tresses,  
Who fought bravely though she was but a girl.  
*Cretan Poem, "Revolt of the Sfakiotes against Alikada."*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II



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## A MODERN GREEK HEROINE.

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### CHAPTER I.

AT length a happy day arrived that brought Miss Valettas news of work, and a prospect of escape from incarceration.

It chanced to be a day never after forgotten in the Sisterhood, not on account of Miss Valettas' humble affairs, though some of the Sisters were pleased enough to hear that that profane young person was shortly to leave, but owing to a certain culinary experiment resulting in what was afterwards celebrated as "Sister Angelica's pudding." The history of this pudding is, among the nuns, the most popular of all the stories that are the special property of the Sisterhood at Saint Adhelm's. The first

convent anecdote the postulant hears is the story of this pudding, and the last thing that can tickle the fancy of the devotee who is learning never to smile again is the recollection of Sister Angelica eating through her appalling allotment of rice. As time travels restlessly, silently on, reminiscences endeared by age gather round the tale, and those who laughed to hear it once will by and by be fain to weep to think of when, and how, and where they heard it, so long ago; at the bright fireside in the then strange noviciate, or when the roses blew in the cloisters, when they were younger and those were alive who live no more where mortals are. And later still, the years will come when toothless old women, the veterans of the convent, will pride themselves on remembering the historic pudding smoking on the refectory table; and, when chill Death has laid his palsy hand on them, those who stand next on the roll will shake their heads and sigh to think that there is not one Sister left who remembers Sister Angelica's pudding.

It was a Wednesday. On Wednesdays in Lent the community ate no meat, and therefore

wanted more pudding. In the days of their inexperience the Sisters went without pudding as well as meat on Wednesdays in Lent, and ate only fish. That judicious protection of the interests of trade, to which we enlightened English owe the privilege of paying from fifty to cent per cent more for everything than it is worth, makes fresh fish expensive in London. The poor Sisters could only afford salt fish. In consequence they suffered, on Wednesday evenings in Lent, a thirst that reminded them of Dives, and a place whither nuns hope not to go, made them dissatisfied with the convent evening allowance of weak tea, and tempted them to indulge in an immoderate way in cold water, drunk at times not named in the convent rules. In short, too much salt fish generally unfitted them for the hallowed precincts of a nunnery.

A chapter of the order met, and decreed that for the future they would have a pudding, a large pudding, or, strictly speaking, many puddings. Plain suet puddings first smoked on the table on fast days. In the middle of a day's drudgery the Sisters had good appetites, and small blame to them. Suet

pudding, eaten in quantities, proved very heavy. Soaked bread pudding was not satisfying. Macaroni, without cheese or sugar, was tried, but for some reason was never finished till Saturday. The Assistant Superior invented a pudding, and dedicated it to Saint John the Faster. Its effect on the insides of the community cannot be recorded. It was not put on the table a second time. Finally the Sisters thought of plain boiled rice, to be eaten with a small allowance of treacle.

So Sister Angelica's pudding was a pudding of plain boiled rice.

It was Sister Martha's turn to cook that week, but she was away, and some Sister had to be found who could, for the day, be spared from other duties to work in the kitchen. Sister Lucy could be spared. She had been a cook. Letting people do what they can do best fosters their vanity, and is therefore not to be thought of in a Sisterhood. Setting Sister Lucy to cook was evidently out of the question. Sister Clara could be spared. She was not a cook, but she liked cooking, particularly in cold weather, the convent fires being somewhat scanty. But in a Sisterhood nobody may do any-

thing they particularly like to do. Sister Clara therefore was not asked to cook. Sister Ann could be spared. She neither liked nor disliked cooking, she had risen above the worldly frailty of caring what she did. But Sister Angelica hated cooking. The fire gave her a headache, the smell of food spoilt her appetite, and the great saucepans, when full of water, were so heavy that they strained her arms, for she was a little fragile woman. What, then, could be more evident than that Sister Angelica was the proper person to cook the pudding, and so to practise mortification, hunger, and humility.

"Go, Sister Irene," said the Mother, "and bid Sister Angelica work in the kitchen to-day."

"Sister Angelica," said Sister Irene, "the Mother bids you work in the kitchen to-day."

"But, Sister Irene, there is a pudding to-day, and I don't know how to cook it."

"Our Mother said nothing about that, she said you were to work in the kitchen."

"But I must get some one to show me how to cook the rice."

"Your remarks, Sister Angelica, show great want of humility. It is silent time, and we

must not break the rule of our order by unnecessary speech."

Sister Angelica bowed her head in mute obedience to the commands of her Superior, and went to the kitchen. She found the sauce-pans, and filled them with water. The twelve pudding-cloths she took from the drawer, the twelve pudding-basins from the dresser, and cut off twelve pudding-strings from the reel. For this celebrated pudding was twelve puddings. Then she uncovered the great earthenware tub in which the rice for the puddings had been put by the housekeeper. *There was not rice enough to fill six of the twelve basins!*

Now what should Sister Angelica do? It was silence time. She must not speak. It would soon be time to put the puddings into the pot. She must not hesitate. But she knew where the convent stores were kept, and found, when she got there, that the door had been by accident left unlocked, so she took as much more rice as she liked, and hied her back to the kitchen.

Then she filled the basins up to the brim, and heaped up the rice in the middle, and patted it down with a great spoon, and tied the twelve

puddings up tight in the cloths, and began popping them into the pots, and set them boiling over the fire.

Whilst she was doing this, who should come into the kitchen but Miss Valettas.

"Oh! Sister Angelica, is that you? I've found somebody at last. I've been wandering all over the place trying to discover some of the Sisters. Look what I have found!"

She was carrying something in the skirts of her dress. Sister Angelica did not mean to speak, but there was no harm in gratifying her curiosity by looking.

"Are they not beauties?" continued Miss Valettas, displaying, all in a heap in her skirt, four little blind kittens, about two days old, with pink paws, and tails like vent-pegs. As she moved her dress they set up a tiny miu, miu.

"Why, they are kittens!" exclaimed Sister Angelica, surprised into breaking the rules. "Where did you find them?"

"In the empty cell next mine. I heard a cat scratching at the door and crying, and when I went to look, I found Tabby with all these little kittywigs in a corner."



"Our Tabby? The Mother's cat?"

"Yes, don't you see her?" said Bourbachokátzouli, pointing to the old cat, who was rubbing herself against her ankles, and looking up, half pleased to have her offspring noticed, and half anxious to get them restored to herself. "Poor puss, she must be hungry, give her some milk, Sister, and I'll make her a bed by the fire. Are these not funny little urchins? There, Tabby, is a nest for you, and here are your kittens. Now, Sister Angelica, where is the milk?"

Miss Valettas had taken a round basket from off the dresser, and placed it near the fire, with two or three pudding-cloths at the bottom to make it pleasant for the cat. Keenly resenting these unauthorized proceedings, Sister Angelica replied sharply she had no milk, besides, the Mother fed the cat herself. It had, no doubt, had its breakfast, as usual, that morning. Puss, who had got into the basket, and was pawing her kittens, and purring to herself, not seeming much in want of anything, Bourbachokátzouli did not press the point, and commenced instead examining Sister Angelica's puddings.

"What are these, Sister?"

"It is silence time, Miss Valettas."

"Is it? You have been talking, and so may as well continue. They are very hard. What have you made them of? I see, rice. They won't come out right, stuffed hard like this."

"Please mind your own business, and leave the kitchen, Miss Valettas," replied Sister Angelica, led by the instinct of self-defence to believe implicitly in her own way of making rice pudding as soon as it was impugned. She was anxious at the same time to get rid of her companion, for from the kitchen window she saw Sister Ann, and meant to astonish her with the kittens.

"I'll go," said Miss Valettas. "Those will make delicious puddings, Sister, if they don't burst."

"Burst indeed!" said Sister Angelica. "Do you think they are made of gunpowder?"

Left to herself she went to the window, and tapped the glass. Sister Ann turned to look, and understood from certain signs that she was to come to the kitchen. Sister Angelica met her at the door.

"Sister Ann," she said, in a whisper, "that shameful cat of the Mother's has had kittens."

She led Sister Ann to the basket, where

Tabby, who had ceased purring, and pawing her kittens, sat looking about her restlessly.

"Oh, Sister Angelica!" exclaimed Sister Ann.

"Oh, you wicked Tabby!"

"But, Sister Ann, how can it have happened?"

"Sister Angelica, what are you thinking of?" said Sister Ann, severely, and walked out of the kitchen.

The arrival of the kittens having a little disconcerted Sister Angelica's plans, the puddings were not all put into the pots, nor the other preparations for dinner made so soon as they should have been. While the Sister hurried about, making up for lost time, Tabby, watching her opportunity, leapt out of the basket with one of the kittens in her mouth, and disappeared. Ere long she returned, and carried off another, and then another, and finally the last of her blind offspring before the nun noticed what was going on. When the preparations for dinner were completed, Sister Angelica looked for the kittens, and found to her dismay that cat and kittens were gone. This was very inconsiderate of Tabby, for silence time was nearly over, and without the kittens to show,

the wonderful news would be deprived of half its interest.

When the puddings were taken out of the pots, some of them, as Miss Valettas predicted, had burst though they were not made of gunpowder. And where the pudding-cloths were cracked the puddings had swelled in a way that did not look nice. A good deal of rice had gone, too, to the bottom of the saucepans. That rice Sister Angelica threw away with the water, shutting her eyes whilst she did it, that she might not see anything wasted. Shaking her head she hung the torn pudding-cloths to dry, hoping there was nothing amiss, for who ever heard of pudding-cloths boiling to rags in the pot!

The great bell rang for dinner. The feast of salt fish and puddings was spread, and the different sections of the community, and their dependants, from the quire Sisters at the high table to the pensioners in the outer hall, sat down to dine.

There certainly was something wrong about Sister Angelica's rice puddings. They could not be cut with a spoon, nor was there any Sister whose wrists were strong enough to force

a knife through one of them. What steel would not cut, Sisters could not chew. Sister Angelica was called to the high table to give an account of her works. She related how, finding the rice insufficient, it being silence time, she had taken upon herself to go to the stores and fetch as much additional rice as was needed.

"Sister Angelica," said the Superior, "you have put into your twelve puddings rice enough for thirty-six or forty puddings. You have wasted the rice, and made a mess that nobody can eat."

Then an evil spirit tempted Sister Angelica to say that *she* could eat it. The Mother bade her try. A piece was hacked off one of the puddings, and Sister Angelica tried to eat it, and succeeded. Then the Sisterhood decreed that, seeing Sister Angelica had wasted their property, and kept them all hungry by spoiling the pudding, which, as she was able to eat it, it would nevertheless be wicked to waste, Sister Angelica should eat her own puddings, and all her puddings, and nothing but her puddings, till they were finished.

Rice enough for forty puddings! and all

boiled as hard as a board! "If I eat as much as a pudding a day," thought the poor Sister, "they will last me more than a month." Some she ate hot, some she ate cold, some as it was, some cooked over again. Some she mixed with milk and water, some she pounded in a mortar and made into a kind of soup. However, green mould, and grey mould, and maggots, and mice lent the poor Sister their aid, and the puddings at last came to an end, as everything must in this transitory world.

It was in the evening, while Sister Angelica was at supper-time getting on with the first of her puddings, that the news reached Miss Valettas of a situation Mrs. Couton thought might suit her. A Mrs. Rowlands who lived at Kensington wanted a resident French governess to teach three children, two girls and a little boy. She would give thirty-five pounds a year, and did not object to a Roman Catholic. So the place was just the place for Miss Valettas, though, as Mrs. Couton said, she would have liked to be paid more, and was sorry to hear that the Rowlands were not very refined people.

She wrote, as she was advised to do, and

received an answer requesting her to call.

It was past the appointed time when, after many inquiries, and a long walk through strange streets, she found herself at the door of a red and yellow brick house, having tall narrow windows with green Venetian blinds. The house was evidently a new one, and was, to judge by its exterior, the home of people of some wealth. A smart housemaid opened the door, and, on Miss Valettas inquiring whether Mrs. Rowlands was at home, asked whether "she was the young French person what was to come about the governess's place."

Secretly forming no very favourable opinion of a house where the servants did not know how to behave themselves, Bourbachokátzouli replied in the affirmative, and was shown into the drawing-room, where, whilst the hostess kept her waiting, she had ample time to look about her.

The large room, which had a bow window, was crowded with gaudy furniture, the furniture loaded with accessories of every conceivable description. For instance, at either end of the rug before the hearth stood, with its attendant footstool, an arm-chair. Its staring creton

was shrouded under a staring chintz. On the seat was one cushion, propped up against the back two others, both they and the arm-chair were covered with antimacassars. To shield the occupants of these seats from the fire were provided banner screens, covered with chintz, fastened to the chimney piece; old-fashioned screens, also covered, on poles; and a large glass screen standing in the middle of the hearth rug. A sofa, positively laden with cushions and antimacassars of different shapes, was placed in front of a handsome walnut and marquetric cabinet, crammed with ornaments piled on one another. Before the sofa stood a table, rendering it nearly inaccessible. By the table stood two accessory tables, heaped with heavy table cloths, embroidered mats on the table cloths, and ornaments on the mats. A similar disposition of tables, chairs, whatnots, cabinets, and ornaments obtained all over the room. The effect of the overcrowded, tasteless upholstery and ornaments was painful, and to get about among them difficult. As Bourbachokátzouli surveyed the room, she shrugged her shoulders and said, "These English!"



The mistress of this odd place turned out to be a stout, good-tempered looking woman apparently some five and forty years of age. She had plump, and very red cheeks, and the bare look about the eyes, peculiar to women who possessed at twenty of high pencilled eyebrows have come before fifty to have scarcely any. She shook hands with her visitor, and made a great fuss about making her comfortable in the best chair in the room. Interrogations about age, acquirements, experience, testimonials, and a number of similar subjects ensued. The would-be governess answered as well as she could, with the occasional assistance of her imagination, and at any rate succeeded in satisfying Mrs. Rowlands, who seemed chiefly impressed by a letter of recommendation from Mrs. Couton. She was folding up this document previously to returning it, and saying, "a most charming testimonial, Mademoiselle: I mean to call you Mademoiselle, it seems friendly, and will help the children to learn French," when the door opened and three children appeared on the threshold.

"Go away, children," said their mother.

"Don't send them away," pleaded Bourbachokátzouli, "I should like to speak to them."

"They shall come and speak to you presently, just now I don't wish them to it. Go away, children."

"'To it,' 'to it,' what does that mean?" thought Miss Valettas. "I never heard that before, 'to it.'"

The two little girls and the boy came slowly into the room, and stood staring at the stranger, as if she were some wild animal. The boy bolder than the others took his stand on the rug, with his hands behind him, and stared at the visitor's face. The girls, emboldened by the courage with which the lad ventured to approach a stranger, crept timidly and cautiously to their mother, and taking each one hand stood half leaning against her shoulders, half shrinking behind her as if they had some misgiving they were about to be handed over to the unknown woman to strangle or eat. They were pretty little things, twins of twelve years old, the boy, who was only ten, was darker than his sisters and not so good-looking. Miss Valettas felt much inclined to show the

rude little fellow she could stare him out of countenance, perhaps even make him cry. But she feared that by doing this she would destroy her prospects of being employed; and, undesirable as a governess's lot might be, it was at present the summit of her poor ambition. So without noticing the lad she offered her hand with a friendly smile to one of the girls. The little damsel drew her's away quickly and put it behind her back, shaking her head.

"Come, Gwendoline, give Mademoiselle your hand," said Mrs. Rowlands.

But the brother came a step closer, and said,

"No, don't, Gwenny. Mamma said herself we were to remember that Mademoiselle was like the servants, and not to make friends with her."

"Tommy! I *am* ashamed of you," exclaimed his mother, turning crimson, "how can you be so rude and tell such dreadful fibs?"

"It's not fibs. You said it to-day at breakfast, and you said——"

"Hush! Now go away, there's a good boy, and take Gwendoline and Hilda with you, and

mother will come presently and give you sweeties."

"Soon?" asked one of the girls. The children went slowly, the girls hand in hand, and the boy following them. When they got near the door Tommy pinched the arm of the elder girl who, with a tremendous howl, turned sharply round and slapped his face. Hilda came to her sister's assistance, and it was evident that the two would soon get the better of the lad, when Mrs. Rowlands left her seat and coolly pushed all three out of the room, and, bidding them be good children and not fight, shut the door. The conflict, however, to judge by the noise that could be heard without, was continued with redoubled vigour in the hall.

Without regarding this, Mrs. Rowlands resumed her seat, and said,

"You see, I make the children mind me. I hope you'll do the same. I don't approve of any corporeal chastisement, of course you won't use it. You'll find them a little difficult to manage at first, but I daresay you'll manage somehow. Children take a deal of notice, and are a good bit more wicked than people think. They know very well when people are weak

and give way to them, instead of keeping them under. If they once see they can get round you, you may talk as much as you like, and they won't heed it. I had to send away the last governess for nothing else. She was a nice girl, rather too fond of dressing herself smart, but with no more control over the children, than——than——”

Whilst Mrs. Rowlands racked her brain for an apt simile, the door flew open and the children again rushed in. The boy had a toy bridle, and the girls were harnessed as horses, and came gamboling into the room, tossing their pretty heads and long brown hair, jumping, curvetting this way and that, bending their lithe little bodies backwards and forwards, and to right and left, stamping, screaming, and clapping their hands. The boy shouted “Gee-wol gee-wo there! Ho! Ho!” at the pitch of his voice, tugged at the reins and smacked his whip. Then away they went round the room, threading their way as if by magic among chairs and tables, and leaping over the footstools, whilst the whip threatened destruction to half the things in the room. At last, a wonder it was it had not happened sooner, one of the smaller

tables got entangled in the reins, and fell, with all the things upon it, with a tremendous crash. Mrs. Rowlands screamed "Children! children!" the boy cried, "Hi wo! mares, wo!" and they all stood still for about twenty seconds, till Tom, seeing his mother's hand on the point of descending with considerable force on his ear, threw down the reins and made a bolt for the door, followed by the girls dragging the reins behind them.

After that, Mrs. Rowlands and her new governess came to an agreement without further interruptions. The stipend proved to be five pounds less than the latter had been given to understand. In fact, Mrs. Rowlands and her husband had agreed, during a consultation after breakfast that same morning, to diminish it that much in consideration of the fact that the young lady, to judge from her letter, was anxious to get the appointment. There were also certain stipulations concerning washing, the little meanness and great impertinence of which so galled Miss Valettas' pride that she said she would, if Mrs. Rowlands would permit it, pay for her own washing. This offer her employer accepted instantly, thinking, it is

true, that the girl must be very ignorant of the cost of washing in London, but not thinking she ought to warn an unwitting stranger, with but little to spend, of the expense she was proposing to incur. Having thus insulted the girl's delicacy and imposed on her inexperience, Mrs. Rowlands closed the interview with many vulgar professions of the sincerest and warmest regard for her new acquaintance, assuring her that she should find her always more like a friend than a mistress. Then the bell rang for luncheon, and she bade her good-bye without offering her anything, though she knew how far she had come, and saw she was looking tired.

## CHAPTER II.

AS Miss Valettas entered, on her return to the Sisterhood, the portress said,

"Father Beuvelet is here, Miss Valettas ; he has been waiting for you about half an hour."

"You may tell him I cannot see him."

The portress hesitated. She had misgivings about dismissing a priest in this uncereemonious fashion. Bourbachokátzouli noticed it, and said,

"Oh ! I will send him away myself."

She turned as she spoke, and went to the parlour. Montenotte was indeed there, and, rising quickly, came towards her. Feigning not to see the hand he offered, with only a formal bow, and an abruptness unusual to her, she asked, in a repellant tone,

"Why have you come again ? Do you wish to compromise me ?"



"If you can ask me that seriously, I can only say I am sorry, and beg your pardon."

"Pardon! My pardon will make a vast amount of difference to you, no doubt." She walked to the fire, and put one foot on the fender. In reality she was woefully depressed and disappointed about the appointment she had just accepted, and so naturally disposed to quarrel with everything, and, for a commencement, with Montenotte. "Well," she continued, "it is perhaps a good thing you have come. We shall be able to say good-bye. I am going away."

"Going away?" he asked, with surprise, at the same time coming nearer.

"Yes. Why not? Why, you don't mind?"

She had glanced over her shoulder and seen him looking evidently sorry. Every woman wishes to be missed, and Bourbachokátzouli was pleased.

"Yes, I do mind," said Montenotte, speaking slowly. "I'm sorry. I hoped you would come and see my picture again before it is finished, and my father's picture too. I wanted you to be introduced to the old gentleman, and to play

to him. I was going to ask you to dine with us some day."

"You seem to have formed a good many plans for me."

"I hoped, certainly, to have had the pleasure of seeing more of you than I shall if you go away. May I ask where you are going?"

"Back to France."

"Then I must not be so selfish as to wish you to remain among us. You have not been happy here. I hope, among kinder faces, you may soon forget your troubles."

"Thanks. Won't you sit down? I shall, at any rate, be well out of this intolerable place, where women talk in a sham subdued voice of the delights of scrubbing, and the heavenly calm of a dull life, protest how nice it is to breakfast on bread and treacle, and how blessed a privilege to shave their heads twice a week, and be as bald as Silenus. Yet I sometimes feel more grateful to them than I let them suppose. I do not know why I do not tell them of it. Somehow I cannot. Yet I am a beggar, and they have housed me. Poor Mr. Sarleigh, too! I can never forget his having saved me, and yet I cannot make up my mind to like your

friend. He says disagreeable things to me, and, I am sure, rather than hear disagreeable speeches, I would any day go hungry. It is a good thing for him I am going. The poor man thinks he has a sort of right to me, you know."

She had sat down whilst speaking. Her words were uttered in a rapid, peevish, captious way, with which her expression entirely accorded. Surprised that a prospect of returning to her friends should have put her into so evident a bad temper, Montenotte ventured, instead of replying, to ask,

"If you will not be offended, I should like to ask whether something has not occurred to annoy you."

"I am not offended, because nobody is offended by words that have no sense, but you cannot expect I am going to answer your question."

She rose from her seat again and, leaning against the chimney-piece, said,

"Have you any self-respect, Mr Montenotte?"

"Some little: more probably than there is any reason for."

"Very probably. Take my advice and get rid

of it. It is an expensive and unsaleable commodity. Good-bye."

Montenotte rose with evident reluctance, and a look that showed her last words had distressed him. Seeing this look she began to laugh. The artist pointed to the door; a warning that was not inopportune. Then taking her proffered hand, which she let him keep in his, he pressed her, before saying farewell, to promise, if ever again in London, to come to Chiswick.

"I am not so selfish as to wish you to stay where I know you have not been happy, but I do hope that when you have been some time with your friends, and have enjoyed gay days again (nobody wishes them you more sincerely than I), you won't mind coming across to visit our foggy little island, and then you will come to Chiswick, won't you! We shall be so pleased to see you again."

The kindly, hearty words, and his evident disappointment at having to say good-bye, touched and embarrassed her. So much so, that she only shook her head.

"No?" he said, "then will you tell me where your friends live in Paris? I may call on you when I am there, may I not?"

Certainly it was not very sensible to quarrel with this man because she happened to be in a pet. She looked at him and said,

"And do you think I am going to Paris?"

"Well, to your friends—I thought you said they lived in Paris."

"My *friends*! where are they to be found, pray?"

"One of them in England, Miss Valettas."

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Couton. She has been a friend certainly, and the kind of friend it is *useful* for a woman to have."

At the same time she took her hand from him. That and her words combined were hard on the artist; but he bore it quietly.

"But you have friends in France?" he asked.

"Not one."

"To whom are you going then?"

She opened her eyes wide, and, looking at him, said,

"Do you believe *all* I say?"

"I am not conscious of ever having disbelieved you."

For a minute she toyed with her fingers. Then she said, without raising her eyes, and with an appearance of being slightly ashamed of herself,

"I have been deceiving you. I am not going back to France. I have accepted a situation as governess."

"May I ask where?"

"At—Dublin. Do you believe that?"

"Why should I not?"

"Because it is false. My situation is at Kensington. Do you believe that?"

"If you will tell me it is true—yes."

She lifted her eyes to his again, and said,

"Mr. Montenotte, you are treating me far better than I have deserved of you. Sit down again."

She drew her seat nearer his, and said,

"You must not think that, because you have behaved well to me, I am going to behave to you—as your courtesy has merited. I never behave well to anyone. But, as you seem endowed with a strange faculty of believing in me, I should like to speak to you seriously. I hate all sorts of seriousness. Seriousness makes my head ache. However, the truth is exactly what you surmised. I am sorely disappointed and vexed. It is about this governess's place at Kensington. I must earn my bread. Thanks to Mrs. Couton, I have got some work

at last. How hard it is to get, I have learnt in a way I am not likely to forget. Mrs. Couton has been as good to me as one woman can to another, and we women can be good to one another whatever you men choose to think to the contrary. I can see that without her help I should not have got even this engagement. I must think myself fortunate in the extreme to have it, I know. And, after all, what is it? I am going now to live with some rich, vulgar people, to teach their three unruly children for thirty pounds a year. On that sum I am to dress like a lady, and to pay for everything I need. Indeed, Mr. Montenotte, I feel quite depressed about it all."

He held his tongue, for he saw she was with difficulty keeping back some tears. After a few minutes, thanking him in her heart for not having spoken at the critical moment, she went on.

"I shall mind it less, now I have been able to speak of it to some one. That is a feminine weakness, I know, but thank you for listening. It is, after all, better than destitution. I shall never forget what one day taught me when I went about the streets in want."

"Dante did the same."

Her downcast face lit up instantly. "Thanks for that," she said, and almost unconsciously gave him her hand. He took the little hand, and said,

"I think I could help you if you would let me. If I might hope to be like Mrs. Couton a *useful* friend."

"I beg your pardon for what I said just now. It was unkind. But you must not call yourself my friend. There are women who cannot have friends. You are altogether mistaken in me. If you knew what I am, you would not have treated me as you have. Friends do each other good. Nobody can do me good: unless it is good to help me to drown all thought, and to enjoy the hours as they pass. Hush," she continued, with a gesture that protested against what he was going to say. "Don't tell me that is not how a girl should live. I know that. It is the only way I can live. My life has no future, and I would (God forgive me if it is wrong) that it had had no past. Things have gone very hard with me. All you once guessed was truer than you thought. I have been happy, it seems long



ago. Now, I cannot rest, I must not hope, I *dare* not die: all I can do is what I do do, try to forget."

Such words could be followed only by silence. After a long pause the artist said,

"And yet you disdain the assistance of a single friend?"

"I am not going to pretend not to understand you. But I will not permit you any longer to deceive yourself. Your belief in me has already shamed me into truthfulness, your persistence in it will only compel me to make such a revelation of my antecedents as will deter you from coming near me again. Spare me that!"

"No. I say make it."

She slowly passed her lower lip under her teeth, not biting it, as if hesitating whether she should do as he said or not. But no reply followed.

"You cannot," he said. "You know this is but an idle threat. There is no revelation to make, though I know you have wit enough to invent one."

"How you do believe in me!"

"It is very simple. I believe in what I see.

However, I am not going to contend about words. I suppose, though I am not your friend, if I can put you in the way of earning something in addition to this miserable pittance, you will not mind that?"

"Certainly not," she replied, in a tone intended to represent a distinctly sordid interest. Montenotte smiled, and she asked, "What is amusing you?"

"Your attempt to figure as a mercenary character. Tell me your address at Kensington."

While he was writing it down, somebody knocked at the door.

"You have been here too long," exclaimed Miss Valettas, "there is some one knocking, you *must* go."

"So I will, if only——"

The knock was repeated.

"How provoking," said Bourbachokátzouli. "I suppose I must see who it is. Sit here."

She put one of the chairs near the table, and pushed a footstool near it. Then she opened the door. A Sister was outside.

"Mr. Sarleigh is here, Miss Valettas. He would like to speak to the priest before he goes."

"Dear me!" replied Bourbachokátzouli. "I really don't know. You have interrupted me in the middle of my confession." She pointed to the footstool near the artist's chair. "I really am so bewildered." Then, turning to Montenotte, she said, in French, "The Sister can speak no French. Tell me, what am I to do?"

"Send him away," he replied, in the same language.

"How can I?"

"Say you cannot see him to-day."

"But you, suppose he waylays you outside?"

"I don't know what you can say."

"Shall I tell him you will walk home with him?"

"Are you mad, Miss Valettas? We must get time to think." He added, in English, with an affected foreign pronunciation, "Ask Mr. Sarleigh if he can wait for me, if you please, Sister."

The Sister retired, much wondering at a Roman Catholic priest hearing confessions in the Sisterhood parlour. The door was again locked. Miss Valettas turned to her pretended confessor.

"Now, sir, use your wits, please. How are we going to get out of this?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"You are pleasant company for a lady in a dilemma, and no mistake!"

"I'm sure, if your wits cannot see a way of escape, mine cannot."

"What is the use of wasting time in talking? What are we going to do? Think, Mr. Montenotte, unless you want to see me disgraced, and by your fault, too!"

He proposed that the deacon should be asked to wait for him in some particular part of the Sisterhood. The cloisters were decided on, and not too soon, for the Sister had come back to say Mr. Sarleigh would wait. Miss Valettas promised that Father Beuvelet would in a few minutes join him in the cloisters. Thither accordingly Sarleigh went.

Montenotte and his friend made no further attempts at conversation. She sat quivering in silence, he stood by, saying all he could to encourage her. When he said, "I shall go now," she replied, "Be careful. I am ruined if he sees you." As his hand was on the door, she started from her seat, and rushed to him.

"Oh, wait, wait!" she said. "You must not go like this. This will never do. I shall be found out. The porterness will offer to take you to the cloisters, the gate is locked, and she has the keys. Whether you follow her to the cloister, or wait at the gate, you cannot get out. Oh, what am I to do?"

Fear is a horrid thing, and its cruel traits were imprinted on every feature in the poor child's face. Brave about everything else, she was evidently a coward about disgrace. From this her companion drew his own conclusions. He now gently put his arm round her waist, and said, as he led her back to the fireplace, "Trust me, and don't be alarmed. Stay here. Look as if you knew nothing. I shall not forget that I have your honour in my hands. I promise you it shall be safe."

He left her, and went to the door. As he left the room, he looked back and saw she was still standing where he had put her. What was passing in her mind he could not see, that consciousness she had of having met with her master.

He easily found his way to the porterness's little room.

"I think," he said, "some English clergyman is waiting for me in the cloisters?"

The Sister replied affirmatively, and offered to show the way. Montenotte followed her. When they had gone a short distance, he said,

"Your architect has copied your convent from one of ours. I know the way. The cloisters are there."

He made an indefinite wave with his hand. It was not in the right direction, but near enough to deceive the porterness, who replied, "Yes." Montenotte stopped and said,

"Then I will not trouble you to conduct me any further. Please, nay, I insist, you must not come any further. I know something of religious houses, and I know Sisters' hands must do much more work than most people suppose. Please return to your lodge, Sister. I insist, I insist."

To his insistence the flattered porterness yielded at last, with a warning that to enter the cloisters he must pass through a little green baize door on his right. He walked on slowly till she was out of sight. He stopped then, it was in the middle of a corridor, and took out his watch. Five times the slow seconds hand

performed its tiny circle. The minutes seemed ages. Then an approaching step sounded on one of the staircases. Cautiously the artist turned his back to the approaching sound, and, as he listened, looked at the nearest doors, to see if any would offer a chance of retreat. The step was a woman's, he had feared it might be Sarleigh's. He now determined to let the unknown comer overtake him, and began walking very slowly back towards the gate. Presently the Sister came up with him.

"Is this the way to the gate, Sister?" he asked.

She offered to accompany him, and they walked together to the lodge.

"You found the cloisters?" asked the porteress, as she unlocked the door.

"Beautiful cloisters," said the artist. "Good afternoon, Sisters."

He passed through the little door into the street, and drew a long breath of the sunlit air, with a sense of inexpressible relief.

Sarleigh walked about the cloisters for three quarters of an hour. Then he went to inquire at the lodge, and learnt the priest had gone. He was very much surprised, and said the priest

had never been to see him. The porteress, who had not a high opinion of the deacon, assured him he was mistaken. She had herself conducted the priest to the cloisters, and she suggested that Sarleigh was in all probability the defaulter, and had left the cloisters at the very time the priest came to seek him.

"Well, it can't be helped," said the deacon, "but I wish I had seen him. I think I shall go home now. Is Miss Valettas still in the parlour?"

"No, she is with the Mother in the common room."

"I think I shall wait for her. I wonder whether it will be long before she is disengaged. I have not much time to spare."

"Are you going or not?" asked the porteress, who had all this time been standing by the door with the keys in her hands. Sarleigh, after a little more hesitating, decided to wait and see his protégée. The latter found her conference with the Mother, succeeding immediately to Montenotte's considerate treatment, unpleasant. The Superior made no more secret of her satisfaction at parting with Miss Valettas than Montenotte had of his disappointment, nor



did she conceal her opinion that a place where she would be under surveillance was a most suitable one for the young lady. Her sympathies did not go with Miss Valettas when the latter complained of the vulgarity of her new acquaintances, and, to crown all, when the smallness of the stipend was mentioned, she remarked, "I do not see that you have any cause to complain, it is more than you would get if you were apprenticed to a milliner."

Bourbachokátzouli had meant to thank the Mother for the Sisters' hospitality, but this last observation ruffled her feathers so much that she kept her thanks to herself, and left the Superior's presence in a very bad humour. As she came down the corridor she met the deacon.

"How do you do, mon ami? Have you heard that I have an engagement?"

Sarleigh pointed to the SILENCE on the wall, and then to the parlour.

"Oh, dear, can't you talk here? Must I go all the way to the other end of the passage. Don't you know that I am exempt from regulations, and allowed to do as I like, so long as I don't go into the chapel."

So talking all the way she accompanied him to the parlour. He told her he was going to spend a day with his mother and sisters in the country, and wished to know if she would send any message to Alice. She sent her kind regards, and asked if he had seen the priest. Once satisfied that he had not, she soon got rid of him, with some common-place wishes that he might enjoy a pleasant day in the country. Thanking her, and promising to arrange some meeting between herself and his favourite sister, Sarleigh left the convent in excellent spirits.

Whilst these events took place at the Sisterhood, Montenotte wended his way homeward, well satisfied with his visit. Before setting out he had made to himself sundry excuses for going to see Miss Valettas again, but all the things he had proposed to say to her had remained unspoken. As he had, however, undeniably succeeded in ingratiating himself with the young lady, he was able to enjoy the gratification every man feels on finding himself on more familiar terms than his fellows with a pretty woman. No more philosophy than can be got out of a cigar was

needed to convince him it was monstrous that he, Hugh Montenotte, who had a happy home, and brains enough to earn his bread had he been poor, should be the possessor of some eight hundred a year, thanks to the partiality of deceased aunts and grandfather, whilst Bourbachokátzouli Valettas, with a face like an archangel, could barely earn, by the bitterest slavery, enough to keep herself decently clothed. And only the day before Sarleigh had been at Chiswick, and extracted from Mr. Montenotte, senior, two sovereigns towards the support of a night-school, for some particular description of dirty boys!

“What do I care,” mused the artist, “whether cads can read or not, whilst their betters cannot afford decent gloves and their cab-fares. Let Bourbachokátzouli Valettas sell her life for thirty pounds a year, and dinner with the children at luncheon time, and then be rated at sixpence in the pound, that Tommy Wiggins may learn to spell! I think I shall found a society to supply ladies of title with kid gloves. There shall be a sweep’s wife for patroness: a sermon once a year by the Archbishop of Canterbury, followed by a collection: an Act of Parliament to secure

the recipients of the gloves from being considered paupers: a great delicacy in the method of distributing the gloves, that the poor things who accept them should not have their feelings wounded by seeming to receive public charity: and a circular commencing 'The sad condition of ladies of rank (especially of those whose selfish husbands forbid unlimited bills) has not hitherto met with the sympathy it deserves from the hearts of the religious and charitable world.' Bah! What shall I do for the unfortunate Valettas?"

What he ultimately did was this. He called on a small bookseller of his acquaintance, and said he meditated the composition of a new dictionary of foreign quotations. He wished to employ some person to read French authors, with a view to marking passages for extracts. He knew of one who would do it, but, not wishing his name to appear in the transaction, wished the bookseller to let the work go through his hands. He would pay so much per volume for books read and marked, the bookseller would supply the volumes, forward them to the reader, receive them when returned, pay expenses, and charge what commission he thought just. The

man of business only replied that the proposed remuneration was preposterous, but, if Mr. Montenotte wished it, he was at his service.

Contemporaneously with the first packet of books and letter of instructions, Miss Valettas received a note from Montenotte.

“DEAR MISS VALETTAS,

“I have used my influence with Messrs. Binding and Trash to get them to send you some easy literary work, for which you will be fairly well paid. If you will be guided by my advice, do not talk about your work, as that might lead to your losing it.

“Yours faithfully,

“HUGH MONTENOTTE.”

## CHAPTER III.

SARLEIGH went to Nanham. For the first ten miles out of London he enjoyed the society of the voluble Mrs. Tansley. She caught sight of him at Waterloo as he was taking his ticket, and, ever hungry for a hearing, pounced upon him, found out his destination and his class, and secured him for her travelling companion in a trice.

"I felt so sorry for you, Mr. Sarleigh," she commenced, as soon as they were seated in the carriage, he being fast hedged in a corner between her and the window, "because I am sure you must be so unhappy about that unhappy young lady's conduct—Miss Valettas—in the Sisterhood. I know you could not help it—being unhappy. Really it has been most unfortunate, has it not?—her conduct I never

heard of anything more distressing, and, myself, when I was told of it, I felt you would be quite distressed."

Sarleigh cautiously replied he knew Miss Valettas had not been quite so happy as he could have wished. She found the Sisterhood dull. She was a Romanist, and had no ideas in common with the Sisters. Mrs. Tansley began to suspect the deacon knew very little about how the lady had been conducting herself. If so, the poor young man ought to be warned. Accordingly, she warned him, and told him all she knew, or thought she knew, reserving the dance in the refectory for a dénoûment. Sarleigh weakly confessed he had not heard of the waltzing. So Mrs. Tansley told him about it again, or, rather, some dozen times. When he saw a chance of slipping in a word in extenuation of her conduct, the poor deacon defended his Greek friend; when he truly could not, he held his tongue, and felt sincerely and inexpressibly grieved.

"Now, Mr. Sarleigh," asked the fearful woman for the twentieth time, "what do you think of that? You cannot defend it, of course you cannot. You must condemn it. But I

should like to know what you think of it. I said to Mr. Tansley last night, 'I do not believe he could approve of it, Mr. Sarleigh—that young woman's conduct.' And I am sure you don't, but I should like to know what you think."

"I am much grieved to hear what you tell me."

"Ah, just as I expected! I knew you would be very much grieved. I knew you must be quite grieved. I felt certain, when I heard about these things, that, if it reached your ears—her conduct—Miss Valettas'—you would be grieved very much. That is just what I said to him—Mr. Tansley, 'If Mr. Sarleigh was to hear of her, he would be grieved very much. I am sure he would, very much.' And so, see, I was right. I felt you would be—quite."

Had Sarleigh heard of Miss Valettas' insulting the music-mistress? He had not. The history of Bourbachokátzouli's quarrel with the music-mistress, an appalling scene, in which mutual recriminations of the most amazing character were terminated by a kind of fight, having less real foundation than the waltzing scandal, had afforded a larger scope to Mrs.



Tansley's inventive faculties. Whilst she was informing the deacon, for the eighteenth time, that Miss Valettas' language on the occasion was "Billingsgate, positive downright Billingsgate," the train drew up at the station where she was to alight, and, though she stood by the carriage window, and continued her narrative till after the train was in motion, Sarleigh was at last delivered from her tormenting tongue, and left to wonder of what Miss Valettas could have been thinking to be so unladylike, and to use such shocking language. This subject of meditation lasted him till pleasanter thoughts were suggested by the familiar scenes of the country near his home, well-known houses, oft-trodden roads, fields, and brooks, and clumps of trees, to every one of which attached some fragment of his childhood's history.

A young man's visit to his boyhood's home is one of the commonest and strangest experiences of life. House and garden, rooms and furniture, the books, the pictures on the walls, the most trivial things, the plate on the dinner-table, the tick of the hall clock, he finds all as he left them, and receives an impression of

all else having remained stationary, whilst he himself has been changing and moving onwards. With everything about him he is perfectly familiar, and yet finds it strange to be among familiar things. Daily habit has accustomed him to different scenes and surroundings, and he is not at his ease as he used to be. The unconsciousness that makes home home is gone. He hangs his hat on the old peg, and washes his hands in the old room, and is conscious of what he is doing. His memory assures him that all is as it used to be, that this is the old home, and his imagination lends colour to the simple truth, but the odious fact that the perfect harmony there was between this place and his life is a thing of the past haunts the house like a reproachful ghost.

Soon, too, he learns that home has changed as well as he. Had he remained there, he would have been the first to join the girls in their plea for the new bow window in the breakfast-room, for the demolition of the blasted tree, and for the changes in the garden walks, and not have felt that these changes at all changed the place itself. But home becomes sacred when we leave it, and the exile resents

every change he finds on his return ; in silence mourns the worn-out carpets that are gone to the servants' rooms, and unwillingly confesses the necessity of fresh paint in the hall. Perforce Sarleigh felt all this, and, lacking either experience or philosophy sufficient to understand what he felt, let it spoil his visit seriously.

Alice and Lilian met him at the station, the former because she wished to welcome her brother, the latter because she had a suspicion Alice wanted to talk with him alone. On the way to the house the girls met some people unknown to their brother, with whom they seemed to be intimate, and he, with an unpleasant sense of being an outsider, waited at a few paces distance till the brief conversation was ended. Whilst he did so, a gentleman, whom he had known from his boyhood, and at whose table he had dined not twelve months before, passed without recognizing him. It was no wonder, seeing that Sarleigh, in the interim, had shaved off his moustaches and whiskers, and taken to a clerical costume. But the moment at which a man discovers that it needs only so much more or less hair on his face to produce a disguise his most familiar friends will not detect, marks

an epoch in masculine existence. On Sarleigh it made so great an impression that he said nothing for the next five minutes, and would have remained silent longer, had not Lilian interrupted her talk with Alice about the friends they had just met, to ask,

“Did you see Mr. Slater, Fred?”

“Yes, and do you know he did not know me, though I looked hard at him, and was on the point of speaking.”

“It would be a wonder if anybody did know you, dressed as you are now. When I first saw you get out of the train, I said to Alice, ‘That strange-looking clergyman can’t be Fred.’”

Which was true. Alice, too, had begged Lilian not to mention the fact to her brother.

Mrs. Sarleigh’s house stood a short distance outside Nanham. A little lawn, bordered with flower-beds, and ornamented with two fine elms, lay between it and the road. The house was two-storeyed, not very modern, and, as seen from the road, not very picturesque, presenting a plain front, with a door in the middle, two windows on either side of it, and a row of five above. But a surprise was reserved for anyone

who, after passing through the little shrubbery at the left of the house, emerged on the lawn before it. Nothing could be imagined prettier than this side of the house, with its bow window, its long verandah, surmounted by a balcony, the dormer windows of the attics above, and the festoons of creeping plants covering all the trellis-work to the very roof. Before it spread a large and picturesque garden, having a level lawn in the centre, and bounded by shrubs and trees formed into varied clumps. On the southern side, further from the house, were four or five larger trees, which threw, on summer days, a grateful shade upon the verdure of the lawn.

Long before Sarleigh and his sisters reached the gate, Mrs. Sarleigh, who had been watching at her window since five minutes before the train was due, spied them, and hurried down the stairs, and to the front gate, and, on their nearer approach, out into the road to welcome her son. When he came up to her, regardless of the astonished gaze of some passing strangers, she put her arms round his neck, and heartily kissed him half a dozen times, whilst the deacon, urged by some instinct of filial re-

spect, attempted at the same time to take off his hat and return his mother's embrace.

"Dear old fellow," said the buxom old lady, taking his arm, "give me your arm. I'm so glad to see you at home again."

So they walked to the porch. There she kissed him again whilst the girls opened the door. Then she ushered him into the breakfast-room, where, though it was but half-past eleven, luncheon awaited him. Here a third effusion of welcome and kisses ensued, and still left the mother's affection far from adequately expressed, though (alas for humanity!) the son was bored, and the daughters amused, as though that welcome was one of the world's comedies, and not the deepest sincerity of an unalterable love they would live to search for elsewhere in vain.

Would he have his luncheon first, or first go to his room, his own room, where everything was exactly as it used to be? He chose to go to his room. He had not been there three minutes, when Mrs. Sarleigh, having despatched Lilian to fetch him hot water, and Alice to tell Ethel he had arrived, knocked at the door and asked permission to sit with him whilst he

washed his hands. His toy boat, she pointed out to him, had been dusted that morning, and there still hung above the door the chart of Europe he had brought back from school, when he was ten years old, and himself nailed up, with a request that it might remain "for ever." How many things she had to say to him! changes to tell him of, plans to discuss, and business worries she wished he was at home to look after. If he would only come and live at home, or get a curacy near at hand, how she would like it, for the girls sometimes nearly drove her mad. His hands being washed, and dried on one of the new towels brought out for the occasion, she next carried him off to luncheon.

During luncheon she wished to know all about himself and his doings: when he rose in the morning, what he had for breakfast, how many days in the week he went to the schools, how many parish visiting, and what everybody he knew was like. When did he have luncheon? at what hour did he dine? Did they cook his food nicely? What did he have for supper? At what hour did he go to bed? At last Ethel protested.

"Mamma, you'll spoil Fred's appetite with questions."

"Ethel wants to ask some herself," said Lilian. "She is dying to know whether this young female, Beelzebubina Walters, is pretty or not."

"Lilian, let your brother eat his luncheon in peace," said Mrs. Sarleigh.

The deacon had coloured at what his sister said, but he had his revenge, for he remarked,

"I am sorry to see, mother, that Lilian is no less profane than she used to be."

"I hope, now you are a clergyman, Fred, you will speak very seriously to her on the subject," replied his mother.

"I will, mother."

"You're in for it, Lily," said Ethel, "and you deserve it. Fred, is Miss Valettas good-looking?"

"Do tell us," said Alice. "We are all so interested about her."

"Except mother," growled Lilian. "She wishes you had never seen her."

"Then we will talk about all that another time," said Sarleigh, who was altogether shy of speaking about Miss Valettas, but earned by



declining to do so a reputation for filial duty and general discernment he was very far from meriting. He spoke instead of the wonderful intelligence of his fellow-curates, illustrating their abilities by tales of their doings and sayings, to which tales his sisters listened with the courtesy of ladies, and his mother with the patience of a martyr.

At last Ethel said, "Now Fred shall come with me and see the dogs and the new ponies," and so secured the first tête-à-tête, which Mrs. Sarleigh would not have surrendered to anyone else. As soon as they were out of the room, the sister asked,

"Fred, is Miss Valettas plain?"

"Not at all. Everybody thinks her very handsome."

"That's all right, then. Now tell me all about her."

The deacon explained, as well as he could, that Miss Valettas was dark, and tall, and "handsome, you know." He would have liked to say what fine black eyes she had, how exquisitely her hands and feet were made, and to have sketched a striking portrait of his striking friend, but when he tried it, either his

vocabulary failed, or the words stuck in his throat, and only the most common generalities, repeated again and again, would be at his bidding. Ethel rewarded him, however, for his unsuccessful endeavours by saying,

"I'm sure I should like her, Fred, if she is so handsome. Do you like her really, or only just care for her because she came to you in trouble?"

"Oh! I like her, you know. She's a nice girl. Rather flighty, you know, but I really like her."

Ethel looked at her brother from the corners of her eyes, and nodded. The deacon continued,

"Do you think mother would ask her to stay here some day, Ethel, if you asked her?"

"Mama does not seem to care to hear anything about her. There is a good deal of truth in what that horrid Lily said just now. But I can always coax mama, you know. I should very much like to see her."

To Alice Sarleigh spoke more openly. He told her with a little hesitation, but with a good deal of detail, the greater part of what had passed between himself and Miss Valettas. He

even confessed some of his misgivings, which his sister seemed inclined to share, though she cheered him by saying, that if Miss Valettas had been unfortunate, or not quite straightforward, being kind to her was more likely than anything else to help her to do better. This gave the deacon the opportunity he had long desired, of opening his heart to somebody, and confessing his day-dreams of being to Miss Valettas all that chivalrous men can be to forlorn and injured women. Alice listened with admiration to her brother's romantic ambitions, and loudly applauded his grand conceptions of what men ought to be prepared to do for women in trouble. But when he hinted putting theory into practice, cultivating a closer acquaintance with Bourbachokátzouli, and trying to open to her the world of his own friends, by getting her invited to Nanham, Alice, practical female, shook her head, and thought that would not do. It seemed to her they ought to be "quite very sure" that Miss Valettas was entirely "*comme il faut*" before she was invited to visit Nanham. If they were once quite sure of that, she would be as welcome as any friend could. When Sarleigh said Ethel seem-

ed rather more inclined than Alice to favour her coming, the latter at once acknowledged that, if Ethel wished Miss Valettas to come, she in all probability would come, as Ethel generally in the end got her own way.

In the middle of this conversation, which Sarleigh was immensely enjoying, his mother appeared, and summoned him to her room. There she talked to him first of Lilian's wickedness, next of some business matters of a very pleasant description, a great increase in her own income, and some very satisfactory arrangements for providing dowries for the two elder girls. As for Lilian, she remarked, nobody ever could like her, and giving her money would simply mean paying some man so much to marry her and take her away. Mrs. Sarleigh did not mean to pretend she should not like to do this, but she did not think it exactly fair to the girl. So Lilian was to have no dowry. Ethel would have exactly three thousand more than Alice. The old lady had got all the money together, and invested it safely.

"I've put it all in the three per cents., Fred. You get very little interest for your money, 'tis

true, but if you have the nightmare you don't dream you're ruined, and you can see a newspaper opened without having palpitation of the heart, and that is quite worth the difference."

The girls' dowries being secure, and her own income unexpectedly increased, at the time she had finished making her savings, the old lady felt very cheerful about her finances.

"Only don't say anything about it to the girls, Fred. Girls' money is never enough, and I'd rather be able to make them a present when they want it, than increase their allowances, and then not have anything more to give them when their money is gone. I've told Ethel she may spend ten pounds more on her clothes, and that is all I mean them to know about it."

To Sarleigh his mother's arrangements seemed more generous than just. To say nothing of the unfair exclusion of Lilian from any share in the money set aside for the provision of dowries, a rough calculation, made in the deacon's head whilst his mother was talking, showed that the girls' allowances were about in the proportion of three for Alice, five for Ethel,

and one for Lilian. As for presents, long experience had taught him that they fell mostly to Ethel's lot. As his mother had admitted him into her confidence, he ventured to express an opinion on this subject, and even to suggest that the three girls should have more nearly even shares of money for their pleasures and needs. This, however, immediately made Mrs. Sarleigh very angry, so angry that she cut the conference short, told her son she meant to do as she liked with her own money, and, instead of offering him fifty pounds a year in addition to what she already allowed him, which it had been her intention to do, told him it was now time for her afternoon nap, and requested that, whilst she took it, he would give Lilian a good scolding for her nasty temper and profane way of speaking. Should Lilian in reply say anything about Ethel, for example, that she was selfish or extravagant, he was not to believe it, because it was not true. Thus Sarleigh lost his fifty pounds a year. It is but just to add that, whilst he listened with pleasure to his mother's account of her good fortune, and her plans for her girls, it never once entered the good fellow's thoughts that he was

either entitled or likely to receive any share in the increased family income.

Lilian he found in the drawing-room. She was sitting at the window in a low chair, dressed in a shabby merino, her right ankle on her left knee, so that she displayed a good deal of a coarse pair of stockings and large, ugly boots. Sarleigh sat down opposite her. Before he had time to say a word, she looked up from her book and said,

"I suppose you've come from Mrs. Sarleigh to jaw me."

"I think, Lilian, it is a pity you speak to mother and Alice and Ethel in the way you do."

"Yes."

"And I think anything approaching profanity very unbecoming a lady's lips."

"Yes."

"And I am sorry to hear what mother tells me, that you have been robbing her and your sisters. It is a great pity that you should lower yourself to such conduct."

"Yes."

"Why do you do it, Lilian?"

"Which?"

"All these things. Why are you so ill-natured, so profane, and so dishonourable?"

"Because I like it. I'm not going to be jawed, and that is the end of it. If you like to sit here and sermonize to the deuce you may. I'm going."

"Mother sent me to speak to you, Lilian, and I think she had reason. I am never at home, nor away from home, but I hear of your misconduct."

"That's because I live with tell-tits."

"Is it any pleasure to you to be so disagreeable?"

"Yes, it is. You all pretend to like things that are pretty, and nice, and pleasant, and you make yourselves nasty to me. I like everything nasty, and ugly, and horrid, and I make myself disagreeable to you. That is only tit for tat, and of the two I am the more consistent. Have you asked Alice about her love affair?"

"No. I don't want to talk about Alice, but about you."

"How is Beelzebubina Walters?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"That's a lie. I saw you colour. So much



for your being a clergyman. You tell lies. Have you promised to marry her?"

The deacon knew he was becoming crimson. He said,

"Lilian, mother sent me to reason with you, and to ask you to behave like a lady."

"Oh! I can behave like a lady when I like."

"Why do you not, then?"

"Why do you not tell me whether you have promised to marry Beelzebubina Walters?"

"I do not know anyone called by that name."

"That queer woman who came to you in the wet."

"I have not promised to marry Miss Valettas, if that is whom you mean."

"Yes. But you mean to propose to her some day."

"Are you going, Lilian, to attend to what I say?"

"Are you going to answer my questions about that girl?"

"No."

"No, too, then."

She rose and left the room, slamming the door with all the violence of which she was

capable, and thereby succeeding in her intention of waking her mother from her afternoon nap, and so having some revenge for the annoyance she had just endured. Sarleigh sighed. However true his youngest sister's description of herself, as a person who liked everything nasty, and ugly, and horrid, might be, the cleric knew the fault lay not all on her side.

Hers was constitutionally a nervous, melancholy temperament. Her thin, bony, angular features, sombre, discoloured complexion, and heavy step, all indicated a sickly, morbid nature. People of this description are not pleasant at the best, and poor Lilian's lot had not been calculated to sweeten her difficult temper. When she was born her father and mother hoped for a second son, and the little sickly infant girl came, an unwelcome stranger into this strange world. As a child she was frequently ill, always fretful and quarrelsome. Her brother and sisters exiled her from their games, and her parents took no trouble to correct the injustice. Later, after her father's death, when Ethel's promise of beauty made her her widowed mother's idol, Lilian was given

plainly to understand she was an ugly, disagreeable little thing, an ogress, whose mission in life appeared to be to supply a contrast to her lovely sister's beauty.

Finding herself neglected and disliked, the child gradually isolated herself from the others, from their tastes, from their life, held her tongue about her many pains, and her bitter, resentful feelings, and, as she grew up to ripening maidenhood, superciliously chose as her *good* the ugliness and spite with which she was constantly taunted. To be ungainly, rude, morose, and even mean and dishonourable, was her pride; ultimately, she discovered, her interest too. For in time she acquired the right of remaining unmolested, by the repeated threat of behaving yet worse if interfered with. A threat she never hesitated to put into execution if her will was crossed.

This wicked (it can be qualified by no other word)—this wicked accordance to her for viciousness, of an independence, and all else, that had been denied her when sought in any other way, poisoned the growing girl's moral nature to the marrow. Yet whatever infamy she might meditate in her own breast, as long as she was

allowed to have her way, permitted to read what she pleased, and to behave in her own Gothic fashion, she interfered little with the others, beyond never losing an opportunity of saying a spiteful thing, and being occasionally guilty of the meanest selfishness. But as these two faults, unhappily, are not rare in English households, it will be easily understood that the rest of the family learnt to bear her sneers with indifference, and to be on their guard against her selfishness.

Alone, she cried at times, hot tears of passionate mortification, but her naturally callous feelings became gradually so numbed by unkindness and wilful selfishness that, on the whole, she rather enjoyed her ugly life. As she was scarcely eighteen now, with all the spring of her young womanhood before her, well might her brother sigh over the repulsive character she had developed. Little conscious of how much more power than he possessed that man must have who was to do so strange and so cruelly perverted a woman good, Sarleigh determined again to attempt to touch her feelings. Thinking he had been, perhaps, too harsh, he followed her with an intention of

speaking more kindly, and overtook her on the stairs on the way to her room.

"Lilian dear," he said, "I fear I spoke unkindly to you. I won't be unkind again, and I wish you would talk to me a little bit."

"All blarney, Fred, all blarney. I'm not to be humbugged."

"But, at any rate, come and walk round the garden with me."

"No, I won't."

"Lilian, I wish you well. I daresay I don't put things in the way you like."

"No, you don't. And what is more, I will not hear any more of your talk." She went two or three steps further up the stairs.

"Now, Lilian, wait. I've been talking to mother, and I stood up for you." He came up the two or three steps, and stood by her side again. "I told her you ought to have the same money as Alice and Ethel, and I made mother angry, I am sorry to say. But, you see——"

"I see that you are even a bigger fool than I took you for, Fred, and that means something large. Don't concern yourself about me, please. I'm perfectly capable of taking care of myself.

If I want more money, I shall take it, be sure of that. And if you don't let me go now in peace, I won't go to church for another twelve months. It is now six weeks since I last went. That is Mrs. Sarleigh's fault. Are you going to let me go?"

"Yes, Lilian," said the deacon, leaving her and going downstairs in absolute despair of being able to do anything with her.

"What are we to do with Lilian?" he inquired of the other girls when he found them. "I am sorry for her. Mother is not quite just to her."

"Lilian is hopeless," said Alice, mournfully.

"Lilian is horrid," said Ethel. "Please don't talk of her."

So they chatted of something else. Alice showed him her new music, which he turned over inattentively, without asking her to play a single piece. Ethel brought out her new jewelry, and had for her pains a sharp reproof for her vanity, which she had the spirit to take more good-naturedly than her brother deserved. To a number of questions she asked him about things in town, the deacon could give no answer. She told him she wished he would come

and stay at home, that they might see more men, and suggested that, if he could not do that, he might at least exchange his curacy at St. Adhelm's for one in a place in which it might be amusing to visit him, somewhere where there was some society and something going on. After that, their conversation insensibly drifted into a very different channel. They spoke of the time when they were children, quite little things, and of what they did then, the games they played, and their pieces of mischief, talked of broken toys, and pets buried in the garden, and laughed over whippings still remembered, and once far from laughing matters. Then, more seriously, of their father's death, and things that had happened since. The girls had much to say about how their mother had changed since he left home, of habits she was acquiring that proved she began to feel the weight of age, of her strange new way of talking of her death, and the trouble everything was to her. Finally, they discussed a love-affair of Ethel's that had come to nothing but tears and desperation, and in which the young lady did not appear to her brother to have behaved very handsomely. More than once the

deacon's thoughts wandered away to Lilian, and what she might be doing.

Then dinner-time came. The short hour's pleasant meal (in preparing which every taste of his had been considered, and for which the best wine had been brought from the cellar), and the little time he could stay after it passed rapidly away. An old dame, who remembered him as a baby, accidentally called upon the cook after dinner, and his mother insisted upon his going through the ordeal of having the old lady presented to him in the library. She asked him whether he still "loved peppery mint-drops," and insisted on his accepting six. Having heard, to her great astonishment, that the quondam baby was now "a church minister," she expressed a sincere hope that he had not gone into the pulpit till he was sure he had a "call." As a fearful example of a minister without a call, she instanced the Vicar of Nanhams. This brother parson and old friend of his mother, the deacon felt his cloth obliged him to defend, and thus concluded by mortally offending the old woman, who went off in a huff.

At last, loaded with all the best flowers from



the hothouse for his church, with little presents of bookmarkers and needlework from the girls, and of eatables from his mother, with love, and kind regards, and compliments for Mr. and Mrs. Couton, and Miss Valettas, and a dozen other people, having said good-bye to his mother once in the drawing-room, once in the hall, and twice at the gate, and feeling very vexed that she should cry about his going, he was accompanied, despite the cold, cutting wind, by Ethel and Alice to the railway station, the girls standing to talk at the carriage window, till the express moved off on its way to London.

And yet, all that long day, he had been shy with those loving faces, and never felt the sunshine of their presence as he felt the loss of it the instant they were out of sight.

"How Fred is altered," said Ethel, as they walked back from the station. "He takes no interest in the things he used to care for, and seemed intent only on finding excuses for little preachments. Did you notice, too, that he two or three times used words that only common people say."

"He spends a great deal of time among the poor, and is very much in earnest about his work."

“He is learning to be very vulgar and narrow-minded. I think the sooner he gets away from that church in the east of London the better.”

## CHAPTER IV.

IT was one of the first bright days that heralded spring. In the morning a cold fog shrouded everything, but that vanished before noon, and now the pale blue sky was cloudless, and a genial sunshine warmed the swelling buds on the still leafless branches of the creeping plants in the cloister. There, in the shelter, the afternoon seemed warmer than it really was. A bevy of little birds were vociferously twittering in a holly-bush, and the broken sounds of the streets, softened by distance, mingled with fragments of monotonous chanting in the chapel.

Bourbachokátzouli slowly paced the cloister enjoying the sunshine and smoking a cigarette. It was her last day in the Sisterhood. Presently a large fly, who had issued from his winter

hiding-place under the delusion that the warmer weather had set in, came to share her solitude.

His noisy buzzing attracted her attention, and she sent him a puff of smoke, which, however much sweetened by rosy lips, was not to the bluebottle's taste, who retreated before it, and left her to continue her walk alone. Soon he appeared again, and again fled before a whiff of blue smoke, this time to take refuge on the face of a plaster Saint Scholastica, which stood in a niche on one side of the cloister.

His persecutress determined to dislodge him. Standing below the image, she took a long draw, and then, pursing her lips up, sent the smoke in the direction of the fly.

The chapel service was over, and ten or twelve Sisters, in a short procession, with the Mother at its tail, were coming down the steps from the chapel into the cloister. There, before the eyes of every one of them, in the afternoon sun, was Miss Valettas, one hand behind her, a lighted cigarette between the middle fingers of the other, her head thrown back, and a thin column of smoke blown from her wicked lips straight in the face of Saint Scholastica!

Three of the Sisters screamed, one, with a

truer instinct of dramatic effect, fell on her knees. This was so evidently the correct thing to do, that the others would doubtless have followed her example, had not the Mother dismissed them, saying,

"Sisters, go instantly to your work."

Miss Valettas, hearing the scream, looked round, smiled, and, having replaced the cigarette in her mouth, continued her walk with one hand behind her back. The Mother followed her.

"Madam, I wish to speak to you."

"Certainly, Mother. You won't mind my smoking, will you?" Saying which she continued her walk, leaving the Mother to accompany her or not, as she chose.

"Have you any notion, Miss Valettas, what modesty means?"

"Modesty? That is a low opinion of one's own virtues, is it not? I have plenty of it."

"I am not jesting."

"Forgotten how long ago, eh, Mother?"

"Are you not ashamed of yourself, madam."

"Frequently."

"You have reason to be. Throw that thing

away, Miss Valettas. Your immodesty and profanity are without bounds."

"This thing is called a cigarette. There is nothing profane about it. May I offer you one?" She drew a silver-mounted cigarette case from her pocket. "Oh! I beg your pardon, of course you don't smoke."

"Madam, take that thing out of your mouth, or leave my house this instant."

"Indeed, Mother, it is not worth being angry about," said Bourbachokátzouli, shrugging her shoulders, and throwing the end of the cigarette on the grass. "I'm sorry you mind it so much. And I'm sure you are not just to me. My name ought to be put up in the refectory, amongst those of the good people who have done things for the Sisterhood. You know I have lived in a convent before now, a real one, and I have always found people in convents immensely thankful to anybody who would provide them with something to gossip about. If you will only think how your Sisters will jabber for the next month about my poor little cigarette there, not to mention other escapades of the past few days, you will see that I ought to be considered one of your benefactors."

"When you have done talking nonsense, Miss Valettas, I have something to say to you."

"Say it at once, Mother. I shall never have done talking nonsense, so long as I have breath to talk at all."

"And when do you suppose you will be able to talk no more?"

"When I'm dead, of course."

"And then?"

"Oh! I know, Mother, 'and then, and then,' that is a story about Saint Philip Neri. I have heard it fifty times."

"And never once taken it to heart. When you came here first did you ever have a note given you to give to me?"

"I think I did. It was soon after I came here. One of the girls in the school gave it me. I don't remember when exactly, but it cannot have been the day I took the French class. Nor do I remember the girl. She was a little girl. I certainly did have a note given me by some one for you."

"And what did you do with it?"

"I gave it to one of the Sisters for you."

"To which."

"I don't remember."

The Mother bade her come to her room and tell all she could remember. When more closely questioned, Bourbachokátzouli acknowledged that she was at best only "almost sure" she had given the note to one of the Sisters to take to the Mother. She remembered wondering whether she ought herself to take it to the Mother, or give it to the portress, or entrust it to a sister, and that she decided to do the last. Further thought and questioning brought back to her recollection the fact that she put it for a marker into a book she was reading, and afterwards tore a letter of her own to make a new marker after the note was gone. This she thought showed she must have given the letter to somebody.

"But you don't actually remember giving the letter to a Sister," said the Superior.

"No, I do not. I cannot remember doing so, but I think I must have given it to one of them."

"It never reached me, and it was of the greatest importance. You, Miss Valettas, are very thoughtless."

"Very, I know. But I am vexed about this. I wish I could remember."



"The letter was from a gentleman named Milford. One of his children was attacked with a virulent small-pox, and he sent a note to me by a little niece to know if I would give his two other girls beds in our hospital, by which means he hoped to keep them out of danger. The note evidently reached your hands. Since your conduct has convinced me that your behaviour here has been at times suggested by a deliberate intention of annoying me, I think I have a right to ask whether you did not consider it a jest purposely to keep that letter from me?"

"Mother, I have been reckless, and I have behaved badly here. I did not want to come here, nor, after I had come, to stay. I am not fitted to live in such a place. But I have only meant to have some fun; and I know that a joke is a joke, but keeping letters back is not a joke, it is dishonourable."

"And you imagine you would not do anything dishonourable?"

"I hope not."

"Let me tell you the consequences of this letter not having been delivered. Though you probably will not care to hear them, they will be a warning to you. Receiving no answer

from me, Mr. Milford hesitated whether to send the children to our hospital or not. Whilst he did so, they both caught the complaint. We heard nothing of it for several days, then I met Mr. Milford's sister, who told me all. I sent a Sister to the home of the little niece to discover whether the child had remembered to deliver the note. The little girl had gone to spend a few days in the country, and we could not immediately ascertain what had happened. Of course, we felt grieved here, as it was so evident the children's catching the small-pox might be the consequence of some neglect at the Sisterhood. Being sensible of this, I acceded at once to Sister Martha's request that she might go and nurse the sick children. I hoped to save the Sisterhood from the possible imputation of neglect. Sister Martha, I regret to say, has caught the small-pox, and is very ill. We do not expect her to live."

During this narrative, Miss Valettas had become paler and paler, but when the Mother paused, she said nothing, and so the religious continued :

"To-day I hear from Mr. Milford that his children are better. He has had a reply from

the country to the effect that his niece remembers delivering his note to you. Now, Miss Valettas, what has become of it?"

"I thought I gave it to one of the Sisters," replied the pale girl, slowly, "but I certainly cannot remember. And now, since the consequences have proved so dreadfully serious, I would rather not say anything about it. I may not have given it to a Sister. I may have forgotten to do so. I do not wish to charge anyone with such a dreadful piece of carelessness. The letter was certainly given to me."

"You now think it is possible you may not have given it to anyone?"

"I may have forgotten to do so."

"In fact, if you will confess the truth, you *know* you did not give it to anyone. You retained it on purpose. Did you destroy it, or have you it now?"

"I would not on purpose have retained a letter that was not mine. I may have done so by accident. If so, I must have it somewhere now."

"Go and look."

Bourbachokátzouli rose and left the room, pale, trembling, bewildered. As she went

along the corridor, she thought how, a few days before, in the hour of her terror, a man put his strong arm round her and bid her not fear, and made her strong in his strength. If he were here now! Fool's thought, as if any man could fight her battles! She thought, too, how she had pitied Sister Martha, and how little she had dreamed she might be her murderer. Then she sat down, and tried to collect ideas and remembrances about the fatal letter. Had she ever given it to one of the Sisters? The more she thought, the more uncertain she felt. She remembered taking the letter from the little maiden's hand as distinctly as possible. Then she put it into a book she was reading, in her place, that she might not forget it. Afterwards, she certainly tore a letter, a reply to an application for a situation, to make a book-marker. Had she in the interim given the letter to anyone? She made a methodical search in her cell. It certainly was not there. She had not the letter. Her books had been taken away. She returned to the Mother and said,

"I have not the letter, but I might have left it in the book I was reading."

The book was produced. In it was the torn letter.

"You see, Miss Valettas?"

"I see. I cannot think what has become of that letter," replied the girl, dejectedly.

"The doctor has been here since you left me."

"What does he say? Is Sister Martha better?"

"She is dying."

The tears welled up in Bourbachokátzouli's eyes, accompanied by an irrepressible groan. But cry before the Mother? Not she. Dashing the tears from her eyelashes, she said,

"Mother, I am *so* sorry."

"You have reason to be something more than sorry. Two poor little girls disfigured for life, and a human life sacrificed, form a rather grim jest, Miss Valettas. Grim enough, perhaps, to awe even you into speaking the truth, and acknowledging you destroyed the letter."

"I did not destroy it, but where it is, indeed, I do not know. I wish I did. If I had destroyed it, I should feel more guilty than I do now."

"Your hypocrisy is wasted on me. Go to your cell."

The culprit bent her head in silence, under the sense that, unjust as what was said to her was, it was yet less than she deserved. But before, in obedience to the Mother's command, she had reached the door, she turned and said,

"Mother, let me go and nurse Sister Martha."

"And catch the small-pox."

"I deserve that. Let me go."

"And pray, of what use would you be in a sick-room?"

"I could wait on others."

"No. You would only be in the way."

"Let me go and beg her pardon, or, at least, let some one take a message to her to say that I am sorry."

"Nonsense!"

"Let me write her a note, then?"

"Note! Why, child, she is *blind*."

"Oh, what have I done, what have I done!" wailed Bourbachokátzouli, unable longer to master her tears. Ashamed to be seen in her grief, she crept out of the room, supporting herself with her hand against the wall, and so went all the way to her cell, where she alter-

nately lay and cried, or sat racking her brains (too excited now to remember anything) for some recollection of what she had done with the note. So it grew dark. Then a Sister came and lit the gas. It was a little past eight then. She inquired of the Sister,

"How is Sister Martha now?"

"She is dying, the community are in the chapel praying for her."

Bourbachokátzouli went to her little window and opened it. The evening was cloudy, everything in the convent very still. Opposite could be seen the lighted chapel windows.

"Sister," she asked, "where is the hospital? Can one see it?"

"Not from here, but from the postulants' cells easily."

"Take me there, Sister. The Mother will not let me see Sister Martha, but I should like to see where she is. Please!"

"Come," said the Sister.

She left the cell, and Miss Valettas followed. They went along the Gothic corridor, down the stairs, through the long still passages, where there was not a soul. Even the portress had stolen away for a few minutes to the chapel,

where every Sister was but this one sent to light the gas in the cells, and at the same time to ascertain how Miss Valettas was. Next, they crossed the cloisters. As if to taunt her, the gas threw a gleam of light directly on Bourbachokátzouli's cigarette on the turf. Before the Saint Scholastica the nun stopped, and knelt on the cold stones, to pray for a couple of minutes for the Sister's passing soul. Her companion stood by, hesitating whether to follow her example, and wringing her hands. Then they mounted another flight of stairs, and, after traversing a passage, entered a cell the Sister opened. It had been long unused, and the closed-in air was damp and heavy. The Sister opened the window, and said,

"Look. Sister Martha is where you see the two lighted windows."

Bourbachokátzouli looked in the direction indicated, and saw a small two-storied building, standing up dark against the light of the gas in the street beyond. At one corner of the upper storey were two lighted windows. She rested her shoulder against the side of the window, and, with her hands hanging before her, and the light of the street below shining on her



pallid face, gazed and gazed, as if watching to see the dying woman's soul fly away heavenward. Rueful thoughts occupied her mind, thoughts of the outraged love, and fruitless toil, and faded hopes, and many pains, of the poor broken life that was ebbing away. Sadly she wondered whether by that bed of pain there was any kindred soul to understand the last farewell to all beneath the sun of that poor heart a man had broken, women bruised, weary work worn out, and a stranger's carelessness brought to a cruel death. The Sister left her awhile to finish lighting the gas, then she came back and stood saying her beads by the door of the cell. Presently Miss Valettas abruptly turned towards her, and said,

"Sister Martha's history has been a strange one. Is anyone she loves with her, or is she dying, as it were, alone?"

"All live alone, and all die alone," replied the Sister's voice out of the gloom.

"True," said Bourbachokátzouli, softly, and continued her watch.

Some shadows appeared on the blinds of the lighted windows. She regarded them with the acutest interest till they disappeared, and all

was meaningless and motionless once more, for how long she did not know.

Then there was a sound of steps in the corridor, hurried steps, many steps. "They are not going to make me go away from here," she thought. A Sister entered the cell, behind her the Mother, a stranger, and Mr. Couton. As soon as she saw the last, Miss Valettas held out her hand to him, saying,

"Oh! I am glad you are come. My heart is bursting."

The stranger now stepped forward.

"Should you be afraid of catching the small-pox, if you were to see Sister Martha?" he asked.

"No. I was vaccinated last year. May I see her?"

"Let me feel your pulse. Did the vaccination take?"

"My arm was horrible. May I see her? I am not timid."

"Take proper precautions, and let her go," said the medical man, turning to the Mother. It was Mr. Couton's turn to speak now.

"Sister Martha," he said, "has begged to see you if possible. I know you wished to see

her, and you may if you are not afraid, and if you think you can command yourself."

"I *will* command myself."

They conducted her to the infirmary, changed her clothes, gave her some brandy, and led her upstairs. "Prepare yourself for a great shock," said the medical man, and opened the door. Bourbachokátzouli entered. The air was heavy with the smell of disinfectants. Two Sisters stood near a small table. Opposite her were the windows she had seen from the postulants' cells. On the pillow of a low bed between them lay something like a human head rugous and black. After looking at it for a minute, Miss Valettas approached.

"You need go no nearer," said the medical man.

"Sister," said one of the attendants, "Miss Valettas has come."

"Miss Valettas," said the sick woman, faintly.

"I am here, Sister Martha, come to pray you pardon me."

As she spoke she instinctively sank on her knees. The dying Sister did not at once answer.

"I cannot see you," she said, at length, "but I know your voice. I am glad you are come."

I wanted to tell you myself, not to send a message. Don't grieve, dear. Perhaps it was not your fault, and we cannot help forgetting sometimes. And, dear, I am not sorry to die. And I do forgive you, if it was your mistake: perhaps it was not."

She paused for a few moments, and then spoke again.

"You must not grieve, dear. I am glad to die. It is time. I am not much older than you, but I am near the end, and I seem to myself very old, and my young life seems very long ago." She paused again. "And I am glad to have heard your voice again. It is like the voices I used to hear long ago. Speak to me again, dear."

Mastering herself only by a tremendous effort, Miss Valettas said, in a clear voice,

"Sister, I could rather cry than speak. Of what shall I speak to *you*? I am sorry for you, Sister, and for your life that I have taken from you, and for your poor eyes. Dear, I would give mine for you to see again. I did not mean to do you wrong. My heart used to ache to see you go about so slowly, and to hear you cough, and to see you toil at the hard work.

And, Sister, I little thought that it was I should take away your life and your sight from you."

"Perhaps it was not you, dear, and we cannot help forgetting."

"Thank you, Sister."

A long silence ensued. The medical man had twice made signs to Miss Valettas to come away. Just as she was beginning to think she must leave, though loth to do so, the dying woman said,

"Is Miss Valettas still here?"

"Yes, Sister," replied Bourbachokátzouli.

"Good-bye, dear. Don't grieve. You must not kiss me, but kiss a cross and give it me."

One of the Sisters took off her crucifix and gave it to Miss Valettas, who pressed it to her lips and kissed it audibly. Then they put it into Sister Martha's hands. With difficulty the dying woman raised it to her shapeless lips, and took back the kiss that could not reach her otherwise, from the eternal lips of God.

"For you, dear. Good-bye," she said, as she handed back the cross to one of the Sisters.

"Good-bye, Sister dear; thank you for forgiving me: good-bye," replied Bourbachokátzouli, and followed the medical man to the door.

There she for an instant stopped, and silently kissed her hand to Sister Martha.

"Your self-command does you great credit, Miss Valettas," said the surgeon; "you shall have that cross when it has been washed. Let me urge you now to be reasonable, to have some supper, and then go to bed."

Sadly she took his advice. About the time she fell asleep, the poor Sister in the infirmary fell into a better sleep. The first news Miss Valettas heard in the morning was of her death.

"And I am a murderess," she replied, shuddering.

"And the letter has been found," continued the Sister, who brought her the news; "it was in the Mother's room. The Mother said you were to be told, and she hoped you would feel she had done you justice."

"But how came the letter to be in the Mother's room? Was it not my fault? For mercy's sake, Sister, tell me all about it."

"Mr. Couton came here last night. After Sister Martha's death, he and the doctor were very rude to the Mother, and made quite a disturbance. Mr. Couton insisted on a search being

made for the letter, and so it was found. The Sister, to whom you gave it, put it on the Mother's table, and it got mixed up with other things."

"And why did not that Sister come forward yesterday, and save me from the suspicion and misery I endured?"

"She told the Mother after the letter was found," replied the Sister, crossly. "She—the Sister, I mean—is very angry about it."

"That is extremely kind of her. It is I who ought to be angry, but, if Sister Somebody is good enough to commit my sins for me, I am very much obliged to her. What does the Mother say?"

"It was an accident. Of course accidents will happen."

"That is not what was said to me yesterday, when I was suspected of carelessness, except by Sister Martha, poor thing!"

"On whose soul may God have mercy," said the Sister, putting her palms together.

"I should say, God have mercy on those that are left here," replied Bourbachokátzouli.

Later in the morning, whilst she was packing, Mr. and Mrs. Couton came to bid her good-

bye. Her behaviour on the previous day had greatly impressed the former, so that he had even commented on it to the Mother Superior, as a token of a deeper nature than they had credited the young lady with possessing. The Superior, however, replied that many very disreputable women were capable of showing themselves highly sensitive, and even self-sacrificing. Her opinion of Miss Valettas had not altered. Little concerned about that, the vicar and his wife gave the girl at parting their most cordial good wishes, and congratulated her on her exemption from any share in the unfortunate blunders that had brought about Sister Martha's death.

"I have been most cruelly treated," she replied; "and not only has no one begged my pardon or offered me any apology, they have not even said they are sorry for what I suffered yesterday. As Sisters seem to be able to forgive themselves anything, I suppose worldly people must be contented to follow their example."

"We must not be too hard on the Mother and Sisters," said Mr. Couton, gently checking her, "they are attempting a thing that is impossi-



ble, to keep a small religious community in good order."

To this Miss Valettas had nothing to reply. The subject was not one that had much occupied her thoughts. She simply bade the vicar and his wife farewell, and, warmly thanking them for their kindness, begged Mrs. Couton to visit her occasionally, if she could spare the time.

"You will find it hard to manage on thirty pounds a year, so be careful; and good-bye," said the little woman, giving her a kiss and something in an envelope.

They watched her going away along the corridor, playing with the envelope, stopping to pick up her train, stopping again to say "Good morning" to the cat, and to inquire after the health of the kittens, and, finally, with a sunny smile, to kiss her hand to Mrs. Couton before she turned the corner by the staircase; all nerve and emotion, uncertain as English sunshine, as reckless as hapless, and as hapless as gay.

The envelope contained a five-pound note. How ill it could be spared by the giver the recipient knew.

## CHAPTER V.

MISS VALETTAS was sufficiently pleased to exchange the convent and virtual pauperism, for Kensington and an opportunity of earning her bread. The advantages of the change were in effect greater than she either anticipated or appreciated, and more than justified her gratification. She had recently experienced the rudest lessons of beggary and suspicion. They had been crowned by the imputation of having occasioned, by her thoughtlessness, the miserable death of a fellow-creature. To her mobile mind, accustomed to set sentiments far above things, this last had been the most terrible lesson of all. To such experiences now succeeded an almost eventless period of honest, regular work, affording a sufficient if small income. Its natural influence on her

under the circumstances, was to produce one of those profound readjustments of thoughts and emotions by which subtle, many-sided characters are gradually brought to a high temper. Of this she herself had no notion. The change in her was too slow, and too stilly wrought by great, all-pervading forces, to be recognizable. The whole period, the longest in this story, passed in fact, as it must in narration, as the one in which there was least to record.

Once more breathing freely, she entered on her new duties with a refreshing sense of recovered liberty that tided her gallantly over the first difficulties. The children proved, as she had anticipated, rude, uncouth, and ignorant of everything not included in their few simple lessons, as children are with whom nobody talks. The boy was a turbulent little fellow, devoted to teasing his sisters, and having little boyish generosity. His new instructress soon discovered he was a coward, and to be awed into instant submission by the threat of ten minutes in the dark school-room cupboard, where, his mother had convinced him, there was a "bogie:" a mythological fact so serviceable that Miss Valettas did not concern her-

self to gainsay it. As for the poor little lasses, their condition was a pitiful one indeed. So secretly dirty they were, and so evidently unkempt, habitually regardless of aspirates, accustomed to the common use of words that little ladies should not even know, and very full of questions smacking of kitchen ignorance and unpardonable neglect. "Is your lover a tall or a short young gent?" "Have you ever seen the devil that lives in the coal-hole?" "How do they make eggs?" "Where do they catch red herrings?"

Contrary to ordinary governess' practice, as many questions as they pleased to ask were permitted by Miss Valettas. At the same time she tried to brighten, with tales and play, their small dull lives and empty little minds, and to impress them with an idea of being little ladies. She asked for new and more advanced lesson-books, and for toy-books for them to read to themselves, but Mr. Rowlands thought that a sum of fifteen shillings, which was what the books would cost, was a great deal to spend on books, and desired Miss Valettas to teach the children out of those they already had. The little maidens soon learnt to like her. She was

a capital playfellow, and as gentle as an angel. Though they bothered her a good deal at times, the children were always happy whilst they were with her.

With Mrs. Rowlands she got on better than she anticipated. Mr. Rowlands had married his wife for her money, cared little for her society, was seldom at home, and had a particular aversion for listening to what she had to say. They knew few friends, and so Mrs. Rowlands, who had a long tongue that loved to wag, found herself lonely, and sadly in want of people to talk to. The governess, who understood how to make herself agreeable, and was always anxious to please, soon became a favourite. She could listen without yawning, and always managed in the end to agree with her hostess that what Mrs. Rowlands had done was the best thing that could be done, and that the other woman, the cook, or housemaid, or butcher's wife, or whoever it might be, was evidently wrong. This was just what Mrs. Rowlands could never make the other woman or her own husband understand. In consequence she naturally formed a high opinion of her new governess's sagacity. Then the governess

showed her how to dress herself, helped her to choose things for the children, arranged the bouquets for the drawing-room, and gave her, in the strictest confidence, valuable and most mysterious hints about things that were done, and not done, in good society.

Not that Mrs. Rowlands, poor soul, was ever likely to find herself in any such uncongenial sphere, but she enjoyed thinking she aped her betters well, and secretly shuddered at the fearful blunders she had habitually been making. The little society she did see was that of people of a rank not high indeed, but above her own. It would not be fair to say that she had no ideas in common with them, for she had no ideas at all. But they had learned to put on an appearance, sufficiently transparent, of being something. She, on whom all Miss Valettas' advice was hopelessly wasted, could never get even so far as this. She would send a cold shudder round her husband's dinner-table, or plunge a whole drawing-room full of well-dressed people into death-like silence by commencing a narrative with, "When my father kept the little sweet shop down in 'Oxton." Yet she was a good soul, prudery personified,

mean with that gross middle-class meanness which is inimitable, and a little spoilt by the persuasion that, now she was a lady, it was her duty to be more or less supercilious, but yet wishful to do what she thought her duty, and ready to make any sacrifice for her children.

Miss Valettas rarely saw Mr. Rowlands. He was generally late for breakfast, and never at home at luncheon-time, when she dined with the children. After luncheon, she seldom saw anyone, unless Mrs. Rowlands came to chat with her in the school-room in the evening. Mr. Rowlands was a tall, ungainly man, with a quantity of coarse red hair. He looked as if he had been scared in his cradle, and had not since been able to get his features back into their normal condition. To Miss Valettas he was no more bearish than to everyone else. Who he was, or what his calling, she never knew.

When it has been added that, unlike her predecessor, Bourbachokátzouli icily repelled the housemaid's advances, and declined to make a bosom friend, or even ordinary acquaintance, of the nurse, her relations to the

different members of the household she had entered will be sufficiently explained.

Her mornings were devoted to lessons, the afternoons to playing or walking with the children. If these occupations were monotonous, and at times tedious, the enforced regularity was, on the other hand, beneficial to her capricious temperament.

A far more important factor in her life was the pretended literary work her artist-friend sent her. It occupied the evenings, which she had pretty much to herself, and at times fatigued her, perhaps more than was for her good. Though he had bestowed no especial pains in selecting this queer way of helping her, Montenotte might have plagued his ingenuity in vain to discover a more pregnant scheme. As soon as it was set working, he found it not only answered perfectly the end he had in view of enabling Miss Valettas easily to raise her income to a level with her needs, but served other ends too, if less immediately necessary, certainly not less important. Able at his discretion to command an attentive study of any book he pleased, he held the reins of the most subtle species of higher education



to which the sensitive thought of a young woman can be subjected. When he first recognized this, with his characteristic hesitancy, he stood appalled at the power he had acquired over her. A stroke of his pen was all that was needed to foul her memory, to distort her imagination, or to awaken her to safer knowledge and wiser thought. Too honest to risk so much on his own narrow experience of books, he would have discontinued his scheme, had not an appeal to a better read friend for the names of suitable works to send her been readily responded to. His alarms at the perils of his plan were no doubt exaggerated. His inexperience of womankind made him under-rate the power of a healthy feminine mind to throw aside vitiating impressions. But his regard for his friend's intelligence was of a kind her sex will appreciate in the ratio of their own sense of its rarity and significance.

As curiosity led him to observe what passages Miss Valettas marked, there opened before him, in the second place, that curious revelation every mind makes of itself in commenting on the thought of others. Each of the marked books was a study. What she had

marked, what she had passed over without marking, what she had indicated by a double line as more noteworthy, and under what head she had suggested the several quotations should be classified, each of these suggested a fragment of her own experience and consciousness. No conversation, no deliberate confession of the most conscientious character could have unveiled her like those marked passages. At times the artist shuddered to see what she had seen of the evil side of life, at times saw that she had seen what he had not, and learnt from her. At times he was amazed at the things she had passed unnoticed, and at the perverted sight that led her to mark on the margin the very inverse of what the sentences seemed to him to signify.

The last phenomenon suggested a fantastic experiment to be tried on her intellectual faculties. He sent her a play of Shakspeare marked by himself, requesting, instead of selections, comments on what was noted in the margin. She kept it ten days. When it came back it was accompanied by a letter requesting that some of the books she had already marked might be returned for a second reading. She had

learned that she had not done her work properly.

And from that, and from the completeness of her work, he learnt, in the third place, the girl's honesty under circumstances that would have proved, to most men, a temptation to do imperfect work too strong to be resisted. Montenotte paid handsomely, but certainly, if man ever did, he had his money's worth.

To unsuspecting Bourbachokátzouli, in childish innocence penning her friend a weekly letter of brusque confessions, the literary work appeared in the light of a means of adding to her income by what was rather a pleasant amusement than a real occupation. Of the immense value of much that was sent her to read, her appreciation increased by degrees. A growing habit of pondering on what she read ensued. Her isolation nurtured it. She thought not very deeply nor for long at a time, but at times acutely, and with a restive wish for some interchange of ideas with a stronger and more experienced intelligence. Ultimately she became conscious that her ordinary thought had gained width and accuracy, that she saw things in aspects differing considerably from those in

which they had a few months before appeared to her.

Inconsistent as it might appear, all this helped her very little to bear the, to her nature, great hardships of her situation. Not thoughtfulness, but callous stupidity is the best protection against the rude buffets of life. The strain of the great self-control under which she found it needful to place herself well-nigh overmastered her strength. The habitual carelessness, a wilful oblivion of anxieties had bred, mutinied loudly against a mechanical regime. It was only by saying to herself, actually saying the words aloud, "I will be mistress of myself," that she curbed her wayward temperament, and forced it into a sullen obedience to her choice. More than once she was on the very verge of breaking down. But the heroism with which women sacrifice their all for some poor end came to her aid, and enabled her to hold on to her purpose, and to the undignified life full of vulgar hardships, and generous self-denial. Still, make what she would of it, learning to endure common-place things was a grim lesson, and Bourbachokátzouli felt at times that her natural brightness was being crushed. On such

occasions she speculated how much longer she should persevere, and whether, when she finally failed to curb herself, she should be more glad or sorry.

Thus the days quietly passed by till the pale-green, delicate, young leaves of the limes and chestnuts in the gardens, that hung on the branches, too weak to hold themselves up, when Bourbachokátzouli came to Kensington, had become strong and broad, and the turf had grown thick, and the sunshine warm, and the mild May days were come, so that she and her pupils were able at times to sit in the garden, and to do lessons in the fresh air under the shade of the leaves. The children had made unexpected progress. They had dropped from their vocabulary certain undesirable expletives and nouns, which they, however, assured Miss Valettas "papa" still used, and when they came down dressed for dessert were fit to be seen, and knew how to behave prettily.

The events that had taken place were few.

Sarleigh had annoyed his protégée by calling twice, soon after she first entered on her duties. On the former occasion she sent him word she

was engaged, but did not so escape being very straitly questioned by Mrs. Rowlands concerning the exact nature of her friendship with the deacon, nor the humiliation of being plainly told acquaintances of the masculine gender would not be tolerated. When he called again she saw him, because she saw no other way of being rid of him. She let him clearly understand his visits were indiscreet, and, so far from being agreeable to herself, put her in an embarrassing position, and imperilled her hardly-obtained chance of getting her living. In vain Sarleigh urged that nothing was further from his wish than to injure her. He pleaded his services, their friendship, his interest in her welfare, and even summoned courage openly to acknowledge "he had missed her very much."

Miss Valettas was inexorable. When he inquired how and when he was to see her, she replied she did not know that he could see her, or had any reason for wishing to see her. Forbidden the light of her countenance, he implored for permission to write, which was also refused. Stung by this, the curate was betrayed by his very fidelity into discourtesy. He plainly told the young lady she had made use of him, and

ungratefully wanted to be rid of him, now she thought she could do without him.

"Mr. Sarleigh," she answered, "if you have come here to speak to me like that, I need not regret that I have had to request you neither to write to me nor to call upon me again."

The deacon went home depressed and disappointed. He liked Miss Valettas a good deal. And he wanted to be her protector, and to act a big, prominent part in her life. He clung to this idea with a dogged tenacity. But it was not very clear to him how he was to be a great personage in the history of a woman with whom he was forbidden to hold any communication. Still undaunted, by some means, some day, he meant to be something very important to Miss Valettas. In the meantime, he consoled himself with such messages and news as could be got through his sister Alice, with whom Bourbachokátzouli occasionally exchanged short letters. He also schemed diligently that his friend should be invited to Nanham, a project she herself, though he did not suspect it, was very willing to approve, as it might be convenient to her to know where she could spend a month's holiday.

Once by accident Bourbachokátzouli met

Montenotte. It was at a railway station. She had been sent by Mrs. Rowlands on an errand by rail. They had not two minutes to talk. During those two minutes he heard with pleasure that she was comfortable and contented with her work. But the muscles of his cheek grew rigid when she mentioned some little contretemps, how Mr. Rowlands had asked her at breakfast to rise and ring the bell for him, and had sent her out to post his letters in the rain.

A few weeks later, one evening when she was in her room, with a book in her lap, to finish noting which she had sat up late, and now, having wasted time in a reverie, was feeling too tired to read, she thought she heard a disturbance in the hall. Cautiously extinguishing the candle (a suspicion was in her mind that good governesses should be asleep by this time), she quietly opened her door and listened. Her room, though as comfortable a little room as she could desire, was at the top of the house, and what was passing below could not be very plainly heard. Certainly a very loud, thick, incoherent voice was Mr. Rowlands', and apparently the footman, who was disputing with him,



was doing his best to persuade him to go to bed, and to help him upstairs. Miss Valettas closed her door again, with a suspicion she had for some time had considerably strengthened.

Later, this suspicion became a certainty. Mrs. Rowlands gave, for the benefit of some of her less fashionable friends, an entertainment, consisting of a dinner, to be followed by a little dance. Some people who were not invited to the dinner were asked later in the evening to join in the dancing. The governess was not allowed to mix even with these inferior acquaintances. She incidentally learnt from the children there had been a debate on the subject between the master and mistress of the house. Papa wished her to enjoy the party, mamma would not allow it. Instead of mixing with the guests, she was posted at the piano. Thus Mrs. Rowlands saved the few shillings she would have had to pay a professional player. She particularly requested Miss Valettas to dress plainly, so that it might be evident she was not one of the guests. The governess complied. When the ladies returned to the drawing-room, she was found humbly sitting near the piano, in a plain, high, black

silk dress, with some little roses in her bosom, and a few beads round her neck, a very personification of quiet taste. Mrs. Rowlands, who had no eyes to see the only ladylike woman in the room, was pleased with this implicit obedience, and condescendingly introduced her governess to a lady whose little girls were about the same age as her own. This individual talked to her for a few minutes, and inquired how she liked a governess's life. Bourbachokátzouli cautiously replied that Mrs. Rowlands was very kind, and she very thankful to be able to earn her bread. Her interrogator was evidently disappointed at hearing no more, and made no further inquiries. She repeated to Mrs. Rowlands what she had heard, as she would have done in any case, and remarked that the governess appeared to be a well-behaved young person.

Then, from ten till half-past two, Bourbachokátzouli played, with no intermission save the short intervals between the dances. During these she was thankful enough to lean back and rest her aching hands, and, later in the evening, her aching head. Once, in the course of the evening, one man, a young man, asked

her if he should get her an ice, which she declined. Several times ladies came and asked for this piece of music or that. Two men, who seemed to regard her as an automaton, took advantage of the snug corner by the piano for a private conversation which lasted the whole of one dance. Its subject was a lady of their acquaintance, of whose conduct they spoke in a manner, to say the least, very unguarded. Miss Valettas' cheeks gradually became crimson. She longed to request the two bears to go and talk somewhere else, but felt too ashamed. So, after having once indignantly looked round at them, that they might know she was not a mere machine, she hung her head, and, setting her teeth together, dashed on with the music. Later in the evening, she overheard a fragment of a conversation between two ladies that amused her. One had made an allusion to Raphael and La Fornarina, and the other replied that she *had* read the book of Tobit, but, having a bad memory for Hebrew names, did not remember the circumstance to which her friend alluded. The supper-room was not large enough to hold all the company, and so dancing went on during supper.

At last the guests departed, and Miss Valettas rose from the piano, giddy with fatigue and pain.

"I'm sure you've been very good, Miss Valettas," said Mrs. Rowlands, kindly. "We are very much obliged to you for playing so nicely all the evening. I was sorry not to be able to send you any supper, but I knew you were playing, and could not eat it. Come and have something now. Me and Mr. Rowlands are quite worn out, and I'm sure you are tired."

Bourbachokátzouli declined, saying she would rather go to bed.

"No, no, you come and have something, like a sensible young woman," said Mr. Rowlands, who was considerably flushed. "A little B. and S. will pick you up again, my girl, and make you sleep all the better."

"Now, George, you leave Miss Valettas to me. Come, my dear, and take something, or you'll be ill to-morrow, and not able to look after the children."

They went to the supper-room, and, having cleared a space amongst the débris of the feast, and the dirty plates and glasses, found them-

selves something to eat and drink. Mr. Rowlands' hand shook so much that Miss Valettas volunteered to carve, and waited upon her host and hostess. Having many times declined Mr. Rowlands' invitation to partake of brandy and soda-water, she managed at last to find herself a little cold chicken and a glass of sherry, and was much refreshed. Mrs. Rowlands and her husband were talking and drinking at a great pace.

"I'm sure one gets dreadfully thirsty, George, what between the dust, and noise, and worry. I think I'll just take another tumbler, dear, if you'll mix it."

The tumbler was mixed, and Mrs. Rowlands took a long draught.

"Those Collinses never came after all, you see, Mary," said Mr. Rowlands.

"No. They are that stuck up. I'll not ask them again. They went to the Smiths the other day, and we know what they are. After that they need not have been ashamed to come here. But there, what does it signify?"

"I'd like them to have come, though. It would have made the Williamses feel smallish, because they can't get them to go there. What

airs old Marks gives himself! And that low-bred daughter of his, too!"

"Well, they are all gone now. That's one comfort. It's not the company of such people as this one looks to for the happiness of one's life. That's one comfort. Just mix me another, George."

"No, that 't isn't; is it, Mary? It's home comforts that are comforts after all. There's no place like home. That's my favourite song. 'Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home.'" Mr. Rowlands sang this. "A good glass in your own house. That's the thing worth living for. 'Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home.' Here's your glass, Mary."

"Thanks, George. You've made this rather strong. Won't you have another yourself?"

"I think I will," said Mr. Rowlands, who had been drinking steadily all the time, and now pretended he had had no thought of taking more, till his better half suggested it. "Won't you have a little, Miss V.? It's better than what you are drinking. No? Well, my girl, take an example from me and Mrs. Rowlands, and when you are married never set anything

before home comforts. Here's your good health, and wishing you a rich husband."

"There, now, George, you let Miss Valettas be."

"Never you set anything before your home comforts," continued Mr. Rowlands, regardless of his spouse. "You're a plucky girl, and you played dashing to-night. I saw some of the young fellows looking at you, as if they would have liked to ask you to dance. If I'd had my way——"

"There, there, George, we are very much obliged to Miss Valettas. She knows I'm very pleased with her," interrupted Mrs. Rowlands.

"I was very glad to be useful," said the young lady, quietly. "I think, if you'll excuse me, I'll go upstairs now."

"Won't you just have one B. and S. now before you go? Here, now," Mr. Rowlands, as he spoke, made a lurch at the brandy and knocked down the decanter, which rolled on the floor and broke. "D—n the bottle!" he exclaimed. "Here, Thomas, bring up some more brandy."

Bourbachokátzouli looked first at her host and then her hostess. She knew in what state

the former was, and had misgivings about the latter.

"I am sure you will excuse me, Mrs. Rowlands," she said, "I am very tired."

"We'll excuse you, we'll excuse you," said Mr. Rowlands, taking some wine whilst waiting for the brandy; "you're a d——d good girl, and—you'll let me mix you a B. and S. Thomas will bring the brandy in a minute."

"No, thank you. Good night, Mrs. Rowlands. Good night, Mr. Rowlands."

"Good night, my dear," said the mistress, prudently making no attempt to rise, but offering her hand, and smiling rather sillily. "Good night. I'm much obliged to you."

"And so am I, Miss Valettas," said Mr. Rowlands, getting up and trying, with the assistance of his chair, to stand. "We're both very much obliged to you. You're a good girl, and a deuced obliging girl, and I like you. Good night, Miss V., good night. You'll shake hands, won't you?"

Bourbachokátzouli gave him her hand, which he shook for about a minute.

"You're a deuced obliging girl, mind, that you are. And we are very much obliged to you.



I'd open the door for you, but I want to talk to Mrs. Rowlands. You'll shake hands again, won't you?"

Miss Valettas only bowed and said, "Thank you."

"That's a good girl, Mary, a deuced good girl, and an obliging girl," said Mr. Rowlands, when she was gone, whilst he poured out some more brandy.

"She is a good girl, George, and she does her work well. Poor thing, I think she looks worn sometimes."

"Wants a lover, Mary. That's what's the matter with her. A deuced fine girl like that, 'tis a wonder to me she has not half a dozen."

The next morning Mrs. Rowlands was at considerable pains to explain to her governess that, though Mr. Rowlands had "had a little more than he should have had," after his guests departed the previous evening, he was not in the habit of drinking too much. His being a little excited, for he was a little excited, was owing chiefly to the thirst occasioned by hot rooms, and partly, too, to the natural weakness of his stomach. The governess listened, formed her own opinions, kept them to herself, and went on

with her work. In the evening she reconnoitered her position. How sick she was of these people, and their mean, vulgar ways! How forlorn a hope the contest with her wayward nature was! Yet, if she left them, all the annoyances and uncertainties of seeking new work must again be gone through. She might, after all, find a less comfortable home, one where she could do no literary work, without which she would infallibly be in difficulties. Now she might, if she chose, save money, if she had such a thing as the capability of saving money in her composition. Her occupations, at any rate, helped her to forget some things she would rather not remember, and so she chose to remain where she was, chiefly for the sake of security and oblivion.

By continuing her work as if nothing had occurred, and prudently acquiescing in the postulate of Mr. Rowlands' general sobriety, Bourbachokátzouli gave her employers an amount of satisfaction she little suspected. In a fit of generous gratitude, Mrs. Rowlands gave her a half-holiday, and took her to the Academy. Miss Valettas paid half the cab fare, and her shilling. The exhibition enchanted her. It

was the only treat the poor child had had for months. Before some of the pictures she would have stood for an hour. Though censured for her extravagance by Mrs. Rowlands, who could not afford a shilling, she bought "Academy Notes," and scribbled little notes of her own on its margins. Ere long, Mrs. Rowlands, who could not see half so much to wonder at as her governess did, heartily repented of having brought her. There was the greatest difficulty in getting her to come away from one picture to look at another, and her repeated, "Do you know who Mr. So-and-so is?" "Have you ever seen other pictures by So-and-so?" "Is Mr. So-and-so one of the great artists?" "Does Mr. So-and-so generally paint historical pieces?" became extremely fatiguing to a hearer who could not answer a single question. Mentally Mrs. Rowlands vowed she would never bring Miss Valettas again. In vain the governess made a point of saying something pretty about all the pictures Mrs. Rowlands admired, which were not always the best: a person who took so long to see things was not a fit companion for any sightseer.

Suddenly Bourbachokátzouli's eyes fell on a

little crowd round a picture in the centre of one of the walls. What was it? No —. *The Farewell*. HUGH MONTENOTTE. "En amour il n'y a d'adieu véritable que celui qu'on ne dit pas." Her heart beat fast. Patiently she watched her opportunity of getting in front of the picture, and having a good view of it. When she did so she found it so wonderfully altered since she last saw it that it took her quite by surprise. As it appeared to her, with the exception of the figures maintaining their relative positions, everything was changed. The man was walking away. His hands were thrust into his pockets, and an easy sarcastic smile played round his lips. The girl stood behind him watching his departure. Her face was but partly turned towards him, and her features wore an expression of contemptuous scorn. A hardness about the lines of both her lips and his suggested the relentless determination of two inflexible wills.

The scene of this parting was an open heath on an August evening, and the varied effects of the low softened light on highly-wrought features, on the delicate texture of the girl's dress, and on the pink heatherbells in the fore-

ground, were rendered with brilliant intensity. A dexterous manipulation of the evening shadows gave a melancholy tone to the surrounding heath, and the strong contrast between the insouciance of the lovers and the lonely mournfulness of their situation, heightened the force of the picture.

"Only to look at it makes me quite low-spirited," said Miss Valettas.

"It does not look as if they had said farewell at all," observed Mrs. Rowlands.

Two men standing behind Bourbachokátzouli were discussing the picture in terms of high approval. The painter, they said, would turn out a great artist. How proud she felt of knowing him! Hers was a strange nature, and his brilliant success before the eyes of the great world attracted her to him more than all his delicate kindness, more than all his sterling worth.

## CHAPTER VI.

A CHANGE had come over Bourbachokát-zouli's life. She still rose at the same time, still went through the same routine, still toiled to submit to the necessities of her lot, and to school her capricious temper, still fretted occasionally under the continuous restraint. But her step was lighter, her face happier, her thoughts nearer the pleasant consciousness of a cultivated, healthy girl. Her work interested her. To make the little mortals about her happy had become a pleasure. Even of her hardships she recked less, thinking herself as happy as *she* could ever hope to be. Only at times she would pause in the middle of a tale she was telling the children, or say "hush," whilst they read to her, and then, for a minute or more, a cloud like a dream of sorrow passed

across her face, from which she recovered with a sigh or a smile, asking, "Where were we, children?"

She was looking much better, stronger, healthier, handsomer. Her lissome figure, so cruelly wasted by hunger and cold, had recovered its mould. Day by day her face won back its significant beauty, which, when it returned in its fulness, would surely boast some traits more subtle than it had before she tasted disgrace and despair. Even Mrs. Rowlands stole at times an unseen look at her, and muttered to herself, "I'm blest if I ever saw any girl like her. And I do believe she grows handsomer every day." In the neighbourhood "Mrs. Rowlands' handsome governess," who, some people said, had no antecedents, was the admiration of all the men, and a person whose mention some ladies resented.

The causes of so great a change were various. First, physical: good food, wholesome lodging, healthy exercise. Next, the kindlier behaviour of her employers, with whom the meek perseverance with which she bent to her humble tasks did not pass as unnoticed as she supposed. Mrs. Rowlands might not know what learning

was, nor teaching either, but she did know what resident governesses are, or too many of them, and that hers was very different. She said, "God bless Miss Valettas for being good to the children," at the end of her prayers, when she remembered to say them. She wondered how it was that such a woman came to be a governess, and felt sure "there was a hitch in it somewhere," but she was prompt to show the humblest, handsomest woman she had ever met that she appreciated her gentleness to her children. One evening Mrs. Rowlands unexpectedly kissed her when she wished her good night, and said (the good soul had tears in her eyes, and could scarcely speak for emotion),

"I do hope you are happy here, Miss Valettas. God bless you for being so good to my little children."

The consciousness of being valued is the sunshine of those who obey. Those who command might command almost anything if they would remember it. From that evening Bourbachokátzouli's work was no longer drudgery.

Need it be said that these were not the only causes of her new contentment? A young and thoughtful woman instinctively



looks round her for one from whom to draw sympathy and counsel, and is how much happier when he—for it is always *he*—is found! Bourbachokátzouli had found her friend: one to whom an accident had permitted a very deep insight into her nature, and who, having witnessed her proud character's patient self-abasement, weighed it, and judged it nothing less than heroic. This was Montenotte. After she had seen his picture she met him accidentally, and yet, so far as he was concerned, not quite so accidentally as she supposed. They had a long conversation. The pleasure of telling him how she had seen his picture, admired it, and heard it warmly praised by others, was hers. His, in return, the tact to remind her she had selected, from among others, that one to be finished and sent for exhibition. She had almost forgotten it.

"I should like to believe it," she said, "to think I had been of some use to you, in return for all you have done for me. But it seems impossible."

Quite abruptly she turned from this to speak of her home, her work, her hopes, her fears. "You are a clever man," she said, "I am but a

girl. Advise me a little. Help me. Tell me what you think. Oh! there are a thousand things I have read in those books about which I should like to talk with you." Knowing her to be haughty and reticent about all that concerned herself, and having no idea of the attraction his success had for a character of her stamp, Montenotte was astonished at the frankness and confidence with which she proceeded to consult him, more than astonished, engaged, ensnared.

They did not meet again. Her prudence and his respect (this was a man who could be tender without curiosity), alike forbade it. But the understanding, that were better named "mis-understanding" between them, for they understood their relation to one another in entirely different senses, sunned the lives of both. Her sunshine, the assurance of being understood, appreciated by some one who was not a fool, of knowing, if she should be in trouble, she dared to go to him for counsel, neither fearing to say what she wished to say, nor dreading to be asked about what she wished to conceal: his, the knowledge that she was fain to give him her confidence, the confidence of the many-sided

mind he had come, step by step, to covet as mate for his own, as he weekly culled, almost stole, its delicate thought from the rigid pages of print.

Why did he stop on the threshold? Did he not understand the spell the Greek girl's picture, memory, or very name exercised on him? Did he not know why he, who, to please his mother, would six months since have married Rosa Mantle as readily as any other pleasant girl, now resented the mere suggestion of the scheme? Could he not understand why the days seemed so long ago, when it was possible to institute a comparison between the dark-eyed stranger, who had drifted across his path, and the bright, healthy English girl, he was on the high road to marrying? Did he not know why he now scarcely did fair Rosa justice in his thoughts? He knew well. And he knew too that she whose lips must speak his doom was hard beset, and yet he hesitated, as he always did, because he was not certain of the result, and dreaded the wreck of passionate hopes, the premature surprisal of his secret might effect.

His secret was, he believed, an absolute

secret. There are few such things in the world. Diffident of himself, he was easily self-controlled, easily reticent. He said nothing, showed nothing. Yet the secret was read, and from his own acts, by the interested, penetrating eyes of one he never suspected, of one who kept the secret religiously. Not Bourbachokátzouli. She only supposed she had found a clever friend. Knowing her own secrets, there seemed to her nothing strange in her having such a friend. So impossible it is for us to see all the bearings of a part we act. Not Rosa Mantle. She liked Montenotte enough to have made him a very good wife, but, being a sensible girl, had far too just a self-respect to be concerned that herself and her fortune did not seem worth Mr. Montenotte's winning. She and he were as good friends as ever, and she about as much interested in his thoughts as in his grandfather's. But one whose keen eye watched Montenotte's work, and way of working, saw all. An artist owes to natural laws, too subtle to be grasped by human intelligence, but doubtless unalterably uniform in their working, the power, ability, talent, or whatever it is to be named, of seizing and reproducing the experi-

ences of his senses. The instant he loves, the impassioned senses leave the impress of their heightened sentiments and more violent impulses on his work. At the same moment he decks his love with all the imagery of art, and his art with all the fire of love. Lured by ability to express into expression he confesses himself with the naiveté of a child. Mr. Montenotte, watching his son's work, with a father's intense interest, saw, as soon as his son felt it, the keen, delicate appreciation of passion, the superabundant energy, the exquisite refinement of quickened sentiment. He concluded his son was desperately in love. Whilst keeping his knowledge to himself he hoped rather despondently that the divinity, the creatrix of all this was not some worthless mistress.

It was about six o'clock on a lovely afternoon in June. Miss Valettas was in the garden with the children. They had placed a rug and some cushions on the grass under the trees. Intent on the tales she was telling them, the little girls, with their curly heads in her lap, lay looking up at the feathery leaves of the Robinias above, trembling in the faintest of summer breezes, or

sat on the cushions practising fanning themselves with her great black fan.

"Now, Mademoiselle, tell us the Greek story about the sky and the sea," said the younger.

"A long, long time ago, when the world was new, and all the people were little girls and boys, and lived upon strawberries, the sky was so near the ground that if you stood on tip-toe you could touch the stars, and the cows used to lick the moon. The sea, too, was so shallow that the people could wade about wherever they liked. The water never came up so far as their knees. But, one day, some naughty boys thought it would be fun to throw dirt at the moon, so they threw a quantity of mud, and some of it stuck to the moon, and you can see it there still. The sky was very angry, and said to the sea, 'Sea, sea, give me height, and I will give you depth.' Then the sky, and the moon, and the stars, went far, far away, and the sea got deep, so that the people had to go about in ships and get drowned."

Whilst the story was telling, the boy, who had been chasing a common butterfly, came and stood on the edge of the rug to listen. He now said,

"Papa says all your stories are lies. And he told me something about you."

Bourbachokátzouli took no notice, but turned to ask one of the little maids about her new frock. The boy would not be thwarted.

"Papa says you walk like this," he said, drawing himself up stiffly, and then making slow steps, putting his feet down with decision. "Just like this."

"And did papa tell you to tell me?"

"I said I should, and he laughed. He and I often laugh at you."

He went off to find his butterfly again. A voice was heard at the other end of the garden, calling,

"Gwendoline! Gwendoline!"

"There is mamma calling you, Gwendoline. Run, dear," said Miss Valettas.

The child returned with a note for the governess, an invitation from Mrs. Montenotte to spend the afternoon and dine at Chiswick next Sunday. With Mrs. Rowlands' permission the invitation was immediately—and how gladly!—accepted. On Sunday afternoon Miss Valettas arrived in time for afternoon tea.

As she expected, Mrs. Montenotte welcomed

her in the way ladies welcome ladies, invited at the suggestion of the men. A small party were assembled in the drawing-room, all, of course, unknown to Bourbachokátzouli. Determined his mother should notice her, Montenotte said, "I shall leave mother to amuse you for a little while," and resumed his conversation with other guests.

Mrs. Montenotte inquired whether her new acquaintance liked pictures, music, sculpture, scenery. Receiving affirmative answers, she encouragingly remarked that she, too, had liked these things when she was inexperienced. When she became wiser she got very tired of them. She next asked whether Miss Valettas liked needlework, housekeeping, teaching children, and cooking. Negative answers led Mrs. Montenotte to conclude that the young lady was "undomesticated," and consequently unfit to become anybody's wife. This opinion she kept to herself, but never changed.

Her stock of conversation being now exhausted, Mrs. Montenotte subsided into silence, broken by monosyllables. Happily for Bourbachokátzouli, before long Mr. Montenotte came into the room, and almost immediately took an



immense fancy to her. After talking to her pleasantly for a little while, he gradually introduced her into the general conversation of his guests. Some of these were artists, some authors, some critics, some less talented folks, apparently anxious to flatter the others in a way that seemed, to Miss Valettas, fulsome. Except when they talked of travel or sport, their conversation was almost as "shoppy" as that of a coterie of clergymen, or supper-party of country farmers. At first, through knowing nothing of the names of English artists and authors, Bourbachokátzouli found herself rather at a loss among them. But this ignorance, so pardonable in a foreigner, was readily condoned, and the graceful ease of her remarks soon gained her a place in the general conversation. After a time the whole party went to the studio. There an event occurred that no little disconcerted Miss Valettas.

She took her share at first in the criticisms and suggestions bestowed upon the pictures displayed on the easels. Soon, however, detaching herself from the larger group of visitors, she made, in company with another young lady, a tour of the studio. The pictures on the

walls and tables, with which the rest of the company, old friends of the Montenottes, had become long since familiar, afforded her and her companion a great deal of amusement. With the liberty girls allow themselves everywhere, they proceeded to unearth paintings pushed away in corners, or leaning with their faces against the wall. In the absence of all constraint, they entertained themselves with criticising these works very freely to one another, bestowing high praise upon some sketches that took their fancy, and mercilessly quizzing others with epigrammatic shrewdness. Searching about, they came on a picture wrapped in a piece of canvas.

"I wonder what this is, and whether we might take the canvas off?" said Miss Valettas.

"I should think we might. What is it?"

But Montenotte, whose eye had been on them since they began searching in that part of the room, left the group, where he stood by his father, and, coming to them, said,

"Little girls must not touch."

"Oh! but we are not little girls, we are both grown up, and we want to know what this picture is that is so carefully wrapped up."

"Suppose then it is only an old looking-glass. If either of you look at it, it will be a very pretty picture. But, as you have looking-glasses of your own, I think, if you please, we will put it away again."

He held out his hand for it. Miss Valettas, who was holding it, said, as she gave it up,

"It is very light for a looking-glass. And I should like to tap your looking-glass."

"You should have thought of tapping it before," he replied, putting it away. "I did not say it was a looking-glass. Perhaps it is not, but we will leave it where it is."

"Now I know what that picture is, Mr. Montenotte," said Bourbachokátzouli's companion. "It is one of yours, and you don't want us to see it. A picture of a lady, I expect. Is it not?"

"If it is, may not artists paint ladies?"

"But why won't you let us look at it?"

"Because I am sure you would be sorry afterwards."

"What a mysterious picture!" said Bourbachokátzouli. "Are we allowed to ask questions about it? Do you ever look at it?"

"Sometimes, perhaps."

"Oh, I know what it is, Miss Valettas," said the girl at her side. "It is a picture of some one of whom Mr. Montenotte is very fond, or *was* very fond. We all know what artists are. And now he comes to look at it sometimes, when he is quite alone, and thinks of long ago, and feels remorseful."

"You are welcome to chaff me," replied Montenotte, good-temperedly.

"I see, Mr. Montenotte," said Miss Valettas. "An artist's love, sweet, not lasting. You artists always forget."

A shadow of pain crossed his face. She noticed it. Was the picture a portrait of some one he had *not* forgotten?

"I must see it, Mr. Montenotte," she said. "I want to know what your fancy was like. I am sure she was pretty, and, I expect, clever. You must have been very fond of her not to have destroyed her portrait when she found a successor, and to keep her so carefully wrapped up."

He looked strangely at her, and her companion, by way of warning, gently touched her elbow. Bourbachokátzouli feared she had said too much, and hastened to apologise.

"I beg your pardon. I did not mean to say anything that could hurt you."

"You need not apologise," he replied. "But don't look at the picture. Let me show you some sketches I made last week."

"I would much rather see the mysterious lady, but, if we must not, please show us the sketches."

But when, ten minutes later, Montenotte left the studio to see some of the guests to the door, Miss Valettas' companion said,

"Come, now, let us look at the picture."

They pulled it out of its corner and uncovered it. It was a portrait of Bourbachokátzouli, finished with the excessive care artists bestow on their caprices. Miss Valettas turned crimson. The girl at her side exclaimed, "Why, it's you!" and, equally delighted at the discovery and her companion's confusion, smothered her laughter in her handkerchief, whilst disconcerted Bourbachokátzouli hastily wrapped the picture up again, and restored it to its corner.

When most of the guests had left, Mr. Montenotte led Miss Valettas away from the others who were invited to dinner, and, as soon as they were out of ear-shot, said,

"The sooner, Miss Valettas, you forget all you have heard the last hour the better. Not one of these people knows a picture from a sign-board. My son says you have taste. I want to know about that. Tell me what you think of these pictures. I won't give you any help, but I'll give you presently my opinion of your judgment."

"Dear me, Mr. Montenotte, this is a tremendous ordeal. I fear the results will prove anything but satisfactory for poor me. I feel afraid to say anything."

Totally regardless of her expostulation, the old artist repeated, pointing to a picture on the wall, "What do you think of that, now?" She replied simply and unaffectedly. He pointed to another, and afterwards to many others, encouraging her to criticise or praise, as she felt inclined. At the end of half an hour he said,

"You have taste. You have seen good pictures, and you know when you see others like them. You have some ideas, too. But you don't know much about art."

"Then, Mr. Montenotte, it is only fair that, as you have been teasing me for half an hour,

you should let me teaze you for half an hour, and be at the trouble of teaching me to be wiser."

The answer, so different from the indignant repartee in vindication of her own taste he was anticipating, took the old artist's heart by storm. Genially assenting to her proposition, he led her from room to room, showing her pictures of different styles and schools, pointing out the excellencies and defects of each. His pains and patience were such that she did not know at the end whether she most owed him thanks for his kindness or apologies for the trouble she had given him. Once, when she suggested she was keeping him from his friends, he answered, "Never mind, never mind. They tell me 'tis seldom you get a holiday. It may be long before you come again. But I shall always be glad to see you. Now look at this."

She had, after dinner, the pleasure of discovering she could make some return for the kindness with which she had been treated. Whilst the men still sat over their wine, a question arose in the drawing-room about a French air, of which two ladies could remember only fragments. Saying she thought she could play it,

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Miss Valettas sat down at the piano, and, after a few essays, recovered the melody. The door of the dining-room had just been opened to cool the room, and the sound of the notes reached the men discussing over their wine the dismal prospects of English dramatic literature. It was one of those dainty morsels of French music (rather too fanciful for most English ears) that are marred unless executed by a sympathetic touch skilled to express the delicate brightness of melodies light as the air itself. The men paused in their conversation to listen. The slow, whispering music seemed scarcely audible. Yet every note was clear and admirably defined, whilst the whole was so soft as to resemble rather some of Nature's spontaneous songs of waves or moving reeds, than any human art. Mr. Montenotte raised his hands in token of admiration. A smile of supreme gratification spread over the face of his son. As the last notes died away, the old man said,

"Superb! Who can that be playing?"

"Miss Valettas," replied his son. "Rather fine, is it not? And to my certain knowledge that woman earns thirty pounds a year as a resident governess."



"Monstrous! monstrous!" groaned the old man. "We'll have it again, Hugh. Go and ask her to play again."

When Montenotte reached the drawing-room, the lady had left the piano. He proffered his father's request, and led her back to the instrument. Whilst she was playing, the other gentlemen came in.

The old artist was not merely enchanted, but also insatiable. Regardless of the presence of other ladies, he continued to press Miss Valettas to play, till she summoned his son to her side and said, "Tell Mr. Montenotte he must invite the other ladies to play, or he will make me seem rude." But the old man, too much of whose conduct was regulated by a notion that manners were not made for artists, told his son he was an ass to suggest any such thing. As soon as somebody else did sit down at the piano, he let it be seen that he was paying no attention, and, after talking to the nearest man for about three minutes, indignantly shuffled out of the room.

Miss Valettas returned to the midst of the little knots of ladies. Opinions concerning herself and her abilities were varied. One or

two spoke of her talent in terms of the highest commendation. Others thought her execution affected. "Where did she come from?" was the awkward question no one was able to answer. But the charm of her agreeable and polished manners was admitted freely even by those least disposed to applaud or most inclined to suspect her. Her behaviour in a drawing-room full of strangers is the sharpest test of her breeding to which a woman can be subjected. The freedom from all appearance of constraint, the agreeable courtesy and unmistakeable ton of Miss Valettas' bearing could leave only one impression. She evinced, in addition, social abilities beyond the formal training any woman may get in good society. Her manner borrowed from her natural vivacity and capriciousness an inexpressible charm. Her voice and mien passed from sad to gay, from jest to pathos, with a rapidity and variety that made her the most entertaining of talkers. As a listener, she could show a real and sympathetic interest in themes the most diversified. Her dress only, certainly such as few young women in her station could afford, proved a difficulty to almost all the ladies; women being notori-

ously resentful of any disturbance of the equation of station and dress.

Shortly before leaving, as she was seated at the piano, waiting whilst Mr. Montenotte sought in an old yellow-leaved music-book for a piece of music he had loved as a lad, and now wished to hear her play, she availed herself of the accident of his son standing at her elbow to confess, under the cover of a gentle hum of conversation, her misdemeanour in the studio.

"Mr. Montenotte," she said, speaking softly, quickly, incoherently, "that picture—I looked at it—you were gone from the studio—that portrait of me—it was dishonourable—I do not wish to conceal it——"

The old artist put the open book on the music-stand before her. She looked round, and said,

"Thank you. I must look at it first." Then, as she hastily ran her eye over the music, she added to his son, "You will forgive me."

"Do you not know that I would forgive you anything?" he replied, emphasizing the pronouns. She glanced at him to know what such words meant, and his look met hers, but only to see her features instantly change from confidence to coldness.

"I know," she said, beginning to play, "that if you speak so to me, we shall soon be worse than foes."

"Worse than foes!"

"Yes, absolute strangers."

"I beg your pardon, indeed," he said, anxiously, but she heeded him not. Her whole attention was, or seemed to be, concentrated on her music. He thought she played with less feeling than usual, but, if so, no one else observed it. At the end (he had been turning the leaves for her) amongst the many exclamations of "Thank you," "How beautiful!" "How exquisite!" he ventured the one word, "Pardon."

"Play that last passage again, Miss Valettas, please," said Mr. Montenotte.

She turned the last page back herself, and, as she recommenced playing, said,

"Pardoned, when your conduct convinces me you know what *friend* means."

If she asked a hard thing, she did all that lay in her power to facilitate its accomplishment. As she stood for a minute by his side after rising from the piano, she said, as if desirous of obliterating his false step from her memory,

"I have been some time waiting to know whether you have forgiven my misdemeanour."

"Entirely."

"And will you find out for me when there will be a train to Kensington? I am sure it must be getting near time for me to leave."

He replied he was going to drive her home, her and another lady, Mrs. Tyan, who also lived in Kensington. The carriage would soon be at the door. Bourbachokátzouli declared this far preferable to the train. She treated him exactly as before, and spoke in the easy, affable tone in which she had become wont to address him. But if it was impossible not to perceive that she generously wished to make his reconciliation easy, it was equally clear she would inexorably exact the condition of pardon. He availed himself of the way of grace she showed him, but it was with secret bitter disappointment, and an increased diffidence in himself, that he returned to his former position of limited intimacy.

The guests departed. Afterwards Mr. and Mrs. Montenotte discussed Miss Valettas. Considerable difference of opinion generally lay at the base of their disputations. Neither had any hesitation about confronting the views of

the other with a flat contradiction, and all formality between them having been long since put aside, and forbearance never bred, their discussions amounted to something closely resembling quarrels. There was a considerable facetiousness in these misunderstandings, quite unappreciated by the actors, and due to the fact that, though time, place, and subject might vary, the little comedy of the quarrel was re-enacted time after time with very slight variety of treatment. Mrs. Montenotte always began. Mr. Montenotte always had the last word. He would as lief have surrendered it as an angry fishwife. The wife generally opened fire with the most irritating observation she could ex-cogitate, irrespective of its having any bearing on the question she wished to discuss. Her powers inventive were happily limited. Invariably her husband asked, in reply, "What she meant by that?" "If he had any feelings," she answered, "he would know." On this the husband commenced a soliloquy, its theme the disappointments the Fates had in store for a man of taste who married a woman above him in rank and fortune, and beneath him in wit.

At the end of the soliloquy Mrs. Montenotte

wept. On the cessation of her sobs, whilst she dried her face, she hazarded an explanation of what she did mean. To each direct statement of hers, her husband replied, "That is false, and you know it." When she grew tired of hearing him say that, she requested to be informed what his view of the matter was, and in turn confronted his assertions with "A deliberate falsehood, Hugh."

After a while the old gentleman invariably committed himself to some epigrammatic remark not perfectly true. His epigram he defended with all the obstinacy of error. Ultimately convinced of its untenableness, he generally lost his temper, and stamped about the room, fuming, and sputtering incoherently. This was the part Mrs. Montenotte most enjoyed. When his temper had cooled a little, her husband returned to his seat, and soberly observed, "That they might as well come to an understanding as go on contradicting each other." To which she assented. Mutual promises, never kept, to hear patiently what the other had to say ensued. Before long they lapsed again into a tangle of arguments, "ifs," "consequentlys," and "therefores," till Mrs. Montenotte thought

she saw how she could demolish her husband with a dilemma, which she forthwith propounded. Thirty years' experience had not yet shown her that her dilemmas had only one horn. As the alternative always was, "or I am wrong, and then——" Mr. Montenotte's reply was ready, "You are wrong, as usual." After this the lady sometimes shed more tears, but the dispute was finished, and the husband and wife agreed to say no more on the subject.

It was thus Miss Valettas was discussed. Some ill-natured remarks of his wife's concerning the girl's previous career prompted Mr. Montenotte to say, "though he did not know whether Miss Valettas came from the streets or not, he did know that if the young women in the streets, and the old women in the houses, could change places, it would be a change for the better."

This was an evidently indefensible proposition, and the old gentleman grew very wroth in attempting to defend it. The crowning effort of Mrs. Montenotte's ingenuity in argument was, "Either I am right, and this girl is a saucy minx, whom you will, one of these days, have to turn out of the house, or I am



wrong, and then, if she is what you pretend, Hugh will be sure to fall in love with her."

"A good thing too, a good thing too! I hope he will. Better than marry a fool, to make him wretched all the days of his life. I hope he will fall in love with her, and marry her too. I hope he will."

## CHAPTER VII.

HUGH MONTENOTTE left his friend at Mrs. Rowlands' door, and Mrs. Tyan at her own, and turned his ponies' heads homewards. It was a beautiful summer evening, cool, quiet, soft, the very time for thought, and he had enough whereof to think.

Miss Valettas was charming in society. Her versatility seemed inexhaustible. He had already observed her under very varied circumstances, and still felt he only partly knew her. Reckless in peril, just half patient in trouble, irrepressible under restraint, fascinating in society, always capricious, what would she be at home? What was her friendship, her hate, her love? All that is deepest and tenderest still lay concealed. Would she be able to give all that even an artist's imagination can ask? He

did not doubt it. By exhibiting characteristics he had never divined, she again and again overpassed the idea he had formed of her, an idea so high that he risked making her appear at a disadvantage by comparing her with it. She was a very Isis, always unveiling, never unveiled. Was her still shrouded self still better than all she had hitherto shown? There are women born to shine, like glowworms, which are not in themselves fine things. The artist knew it, and flicked his ponies savagely.

The impression she had made on his father was favourable: *ergo*, that she had made on his mother unfavourable. Had the reverse been the case, there would have been considerable cause for regret. What a lecture from his mother there was in store for him concerning the comparative merits of Miss Valettas and Miss Mantle, to the great disparagement of the former! But, if he meant to have the lovely Greek, how to bring it to pass that she should accept him? Since he first met her, since long before he cared for it, all had sped well towards that end till to-day. Now the spell was broken, and the strife begun. How long would she keep him at the respectful distance of a dispassionate

friendship? He had seen her twice, thrice, in several months. Supposing Mrs. Rowlands took her to the seaside in the autumn, that left ample opportunity for any watering-place dandy to swoop down on the prize, and then "good-bye, Mrs. Somebody." Better to sham friendship no longer, but, risking the threatened breach, to say, "I love you, and dare to hope." Or was it better to bow to her pleasure, and be what she commanded? Something better than a stranger till she said friend, friend till she let him confess himself more. Must not time ripen her friendship, too, into love? Or would her iron will, which she was schooling herself to exercise relentlessly, enable her to balance for years on the razor edge of an unmarried woman's friendship for an unmarried man? Or was he drifting into the common folly of supposing a woman must admire him because he admires her? Was he not already entangled in all the childishness of love, its irreflexion, its imprudence, its dissipation, its sharply defined, but scarcely divided, laughter and tears? Was it manly to love like this? Was he the sort of man to make her happy? Should he not school himself more, as she did? He

resigned a train of thought there was no prospect of bringing to a satisfactory conclusion, only when his arrival at home compelled him for a time to dismiss Miss Valettas from his mind.

She, writing to Alice a few days later, mentioned her dinner at Chiswick as a very pleasant break in her monotonous existence. The kindness with which she had been received, and the entertainment she had derived from her visit, were detailed in her letter with the zest of a girl that had thoroughly appreciated both. Alice, bound by the strictest injunctions to convey to her brother every morsel of news she received from Miss Valettas, sent the deacon in her next letter scrupulous extracts from her friend's. Sarleigh's heart had grown fonder in absence, as hearts do that encounter no new attractions. He scented a rival with lover-like acuteness, and prepared for action. He wrote his lady-love fifteen several letters. That took the greater part of two days. Of course, he only despatched the last of these letters. It covered two and a half pages. When it was in the letter-box, he wished he had sent instead any one of the other fourteen. The unhappy

missive opened with an apology for writing. Protestations followed of the sincerest good-will, and nothing but good-will.

Proceeding to the subject in hand, he next demonstrated by extracts from his sister's letters, elucidated by comments of his own, that he saw clearly, much more clearly than Miss Valettas herself, "the whole state of the case." "How," he continued, "could a friend's sympathy be dumb to a friend, a dear friend, under such circumstances as these?" He showed her her conduct was imprudent, suspicious, inexplicable, and, if persisted in, "ultimately ruinous." All artists, he reminded her, are good for nothing. Montenotte was no exception. In corroboration of this he subjoined a number of inuendoes, calculated, he thought, irretrievably to lower the artist in her estimation. It was hinted further that the intensity of the artist's friendship was alone enough to prove its baseness. Therefore the deacon adjured "the woman he had saved," by everything most sacred, instantly to end this "perilous familiarity," and to believe him her true and only friend. Determined to secure an answer, he added in a postscript that, if she did not reply, he should fear she was

obdurate, and feel it his duty to communicate with Mrs. Rowlands. No man was ever more severe, no letter more shamelessly impertinent.

"Fool!" exclaimed Bourbachokátzouli, as she savagely tore the letter into fragments. "Why could he not leave me and my projects alone?" Sitting down, she dashed off on the spot an angry note.

"DEAR SIR,

"I have received your very impertinent letter. You have, no doubt, had time to repent of it, and will be glad to hear that I will accept an apology.

"Yours faithfully,

"B. V."

"As if anything he could say should make me quarrel with Hugh Montenotte," she said to herself as she folded the letter. "Hugh Montenotte, who always speaks well of him, and calls him a good fellow and a well read little fellow, and says that his heart is better than his judgment: which I daresay it is, if he says so. What an apology I shall have! Fifty pages or more, no doubt."

The apology was not fifty pages, but it was more than five, and abject indeed. As she read it, she could not but be sensible that she had made her benefactor humble himself very low before her. Relenting a little, she sent him a gracious reply, to say all was forgiven and forgotten. On receiving it, the deacon felt himself a match for a hundred artists.

But his conduct had necessarily drawn a little closer together the people he wanted to part. No woman hears a man she likes unjustly accused without liking him the better for it. Yet the letter made her timid about the notice even her rare meetings with Montenotte might have attracted. Loth as she was to do so, the next time they met she only bowed, and that in a way he could not mistake. In vain he, poor man, assured himself that prudence compelled her to be discreet, that friends could be friends without formalities. Some cruel Mentor ever whispered, "If, when she goes to the seaside, she sees a man to whom she takes a fancy, where will you be?" Perhaps he wronged her by thinking she felt no gratitude for his immediate comprehension of her significant bow. Perhaps he judged rightly, thinking a woman



forgets everything else when she begins to love.

Howbeit, the event rendered Montenotte's misgivings and Miss Valettas' precautions superfluous. Ere ten days more had passed, the governess's sojourn at Kensington came to an abrupt and unforeseen termination.

It was a very hot afternoon. Mr. Rowlands had, since luncheon, been attempting to cool himself with different beverages not calculated, when taken in quantities, to lower the temperature of the human system. Mrs. Rowlands had taken the children out. Miss Valettas sat alone in the school-room. It was cool and shady there, with the Spanish blinds let down outside the window. She lay at her ease, on an old sofa, which she could have wished softer, fanning herself and reading a novel. Suddenly the door flew open, swinging back violently against the wall, as if some one had kicked it. Thinking it was the lad returned to torment her, Bourbachokátzouli put down her book with a sigh. Looking up she saw not the boy, but Mr. Rowlands leaning against the door-post and looking very silly. She immediately sat up, put her feet on the ground, and smoothed down her skirts.

"T' home, all 'lone, Mish V'lettash," said Mr. Rowlands, coming into the room. He shut the door behind him with some difficulty and continued, "T'sh nice cool here."

Then staggering to a chair, he dropped into it. His hands hung down helplessly, and his head dropped on his chest.

Bourbachokátzouli, a little alarmed, rose to leave the room.

"Don' go way, Mish V'lettash. T'sh nice cool here. B'sidsh want talk to you s'mthing p'tic'lar. I feel great 'shpect for you, Mish V'lettash. Mrs. Rowlandsh feels great 'shpect too."

His head dropped on his chest again. The governess thought this a good opportunity to leave the room, and made a few steps towards the door.

"Don' go way," said Mr. Rowlands, looking up, "I wish to tell you great 'shpect Mrs. Rowlandsh and myshelf feel. You're dooshed fine girl, Mish V'lettash."

As he began attempting to scramble up from his chair, Bourbachokátzouli made towards the door, taking a detour as she passed him. She wished to be at a safe distance, in case he

should fall from the chair, or try to lay hold on her. He noticed this, and contrived to get up, and, as she was afraid to come near him, to get first to the door. Setting his back against it, he smiled at her stupidly, and said,

"Shan' let you go."

"Let me go, please, Mr. Rowlands."

"Shan' let you go."

He was evidently far too intoxicated to be amenable to reason, or to have any notion of what he was about. Miss Valettas began looking about her anxiously, and clenching her fists, a trick she had when nervous.

"What you give me let you go? Let me give you kish."

She stood still for a moment, then, drawing herself up, she walked straight up to him, and said,

"Let me go, Mr. Rowlands."

But he made a lurch at her, and compelled her to draw back.

"Shan' let you go," he repeated, grinning.

"Sir, you are insulting me. You shall let me go," she said, quickly and angrily.

"No a' shan'."

He shuffled himself round, and, the key being in the inside, managed to lock the door. Miss Valettas saw what he was doing, but had become far too angry to feel any further fear.

“Unlock that door, sir, and let me go,” she said, “or I will make a disturbance.”

She went to the bell, and violently rang it three or four times. Whilst she did so he staggered up to her, and caught her arm to stop her. Beside herself with anger she pushed him from her. He would have fallen had he not just in time caught hold of the edge of the table. It was some seconds before he recovered his balance, then, purple with rage, he threw down the key he had in his hand, and, calling her a hideous name, flew at her as if he meant to tear her in pieces. But he had mistaken his antagonist. The daughter of the old Cretan rebel stood like a rock, her little feet firmly planted, and her immoveable eyes fixed on his, and, the instant he touched her, struck at him like Pallas Athênê herself.

A sudden, well aimed blow, swift and violent, struck him on the mouth, covered his swollen lips with blood, and sent him reeling against

the chimney-piece. He bruised his head painfully on the edge of the stone, and fell half insensible on the floor.

"Voilà, monsieur," said Bourbachokátzouli.

She stooped, and took up the key, unlocked the door, and left the room. "How I have hurt my fingers on his nasty teeth," she said, as she went upstairs, rubbing her right hand with her left and shaking it. When the servants, astonished at the violent ringing of the school-room bell, arrived, they found their master where the governess had left him, on the floor. The footman and nurse together put him on the sofa. The first thing he said, when he recovered speech, was, "Send that tigress out of my house."

The tigress had returned to her bed-room, where she fanned herself till she felt a little cooler. She knew, of course, before they told her, that she would have to go, and did not much care. Life at Mrs. Rowlands' was not very interesting. It was true she had had a sort of a chance, and she had tried rather hard to do her duty, and, as usual, she was going to be dismissed in disgrace. She wondered what

Hugh Montenotte would say, and what would happen next. And that was all.

Mrs. Rowlands sent the tigress her compliments, and three months' salary in addition to what was due to her. That and a little present came out of her own purse, and her husband never heard of it. She said she regretted Miss Valettas' departure, and did not wish to express any opinion on what had occurred, but she must decline to see Miss Valettas, and trusted she would not refer to her when seeking another engagement.

One last humiliation was in reserve for the governess. Pack as fast as she would, she could not be out of the house as quickly as its inmates desired. Not one of the servants would help her even for money. On the hot afternoon her room at the top of the house resembled an oven, and she became before long painfully heated and tired. As she knelt on the floor before a large box, with her possessions littered all about her, the nurse entered, and said,

"So you are leaving, miss."

"Yes. I wish I could get some one to help me to pack."

"So I heard. Rather sudden your leaving, isn't it, miss?"

"Really, Mrs. Giles, if you have not come to help me, I can get on better alone."

"I come from the cook, miss. She says she shouldn't like, of course, to sit down with anyone as is sent away without a character, no more than none of us shouldn't, but, as she knows you can't have no tea, she'll send you some up, if you like."

"Tell the cook I am much obliged to her, but I have no time," replied Miss Valettas, determined not to let the common woman see her vexation.

Before seven she was gone. The nurse and housemaid enjoyed a secret triumph. The little girls cried till they went to bed, and then cried themselves to sleep. They had not been allowed to say "Good-bye" to her. Mrs. Rowlands sat tending her husband's bruised head. The footman went out and began spreading the news that his mistress had, at a minute's notice, sent the foreign young woman out of the house, on account of the way she behaved with his master.

## CHAPTER VIII.

**B**OURBACHOKÁTZOULI left her luggage at the railway station, and went to Chiswick. Sunset found her before the gate of Mr. Montenotte's house. A quiet evening closed the fervid day. Save in the west, where low lines of jagged mist veiled the sun's last moments, not a cloud was to be seen in the heavens, and the sky showed every shade of blue, melting from the dark dye of the east to the pale tints fainting into the light above the sunken orb. Already under the trees the shade was cool. The flowers and leaves yielded in the evening air a fresher odour, that a faint breeze just sprung up diffused.

Montenotte was seated with his father on a garden bench under the lime-trees. They were smoking, and discussing a projected picture.



The old diffidence still clung to him, a potent source of indecision and inaction that might mar his ultimate success, but overmastered, at least for a time, by a desire of renown for *her* sake, not the highest, but the most quickening ambition young men feel. His present frame of mind was therefore at the same time promising and perilous. Promising, inasmuch as he was contemplating serious work: perilous, inasmuch as he was deliberately intending making his art the handmaid of his passion. To please Miss Valettas was the end, to paint a successful picture only the means. The ideas that presented themselves at such a juncture were necessarily servile, and on this evening his father was combating a number of hopeless projects, at the same time that he commended his son's awakening zeal.

Whilst they were talking the servant announced, "Miss Valettas, waiting in the library to see Mr. Hugh Montenotte."

"Bring her out here, Hugh, or, if you can persuade her to play, I'll come in," said the old artist.

Montenotte threw away the end of his cigar, and went into the house. As soon as the first

greetings were exchanged, Miss Valettas said,

"I have taken you at your word, you see, and come to you in my difficulties. I have left the Rowlands, or, rather, I have been sent away."

"So suddenly?"

"Yes." She sat down in a round-backed writing-chair, and, leaning her elbow on its arm, concisely related what had occurred. The artist half sat, half leant on the edge of the table near. He asked a few questions, and at the end said the Rowlands were snobs, not fit for her to live with. She was well out of their house.

Miss Valettas shrugged her shoulders.

"Yes," she said. "'Tis true they are not nice. Only, what am I going to do? Mrs. Rowlands, you see, will not recommend me."

"You can go on with your work for Messrs. Binding and Trash. This is a bad time to begin anything, because everybody is going out of town. But I fancy in the autumn we could get you music pupils, if you liked to take lodgings and give lessons."

"Yes. I suppose I might do that?"

"The plan, unless I am mistaken, does not meet with your approbation."

"Oh! it is a very good idea, I think."

"And what is your *arrière-pensée*?"

"I'm tired of being a good girl, and want a change."

She spoke perfectly naturally, and without smiling.

"I see. A little foreign tour, or some adventures."

"A tour would not be amiss. What does it cost to go to America?"

"I am sure I don't know. Why do you want to go to America?"

"It is a good way off. I don't care where I go."

"Miss Valettas, are you in some difficulty of which you have not told me? Excuse my asking."

The question was a very natural one, considering the extraordinary captiousness she was displaying. Yet she seemed surprised at it, and said,

"Why do you ask that?"

"You seem so depressed."

"I am sorry to be so bad an actress, or

perhaps your kindness emboldens me to be sincere. I am only depressed when I think. One cannot help thinking sometimes, and there seems always to be pain at the end of thought. But you know I am not naturally afflicted with thoughtfulness."

Gently, but a little seriously, the artist spoke of the cheerfulness of sufficient occupation, varied with such amusements as she might reasonably afford herself. He was not conscious of speaking didactically or sillily, but she soon cut him short.

"I had no idea, Mr. Montenotte, you could be so fatiguing."

"Shall I, then, instead, offer you a hundred pounds to go and enjoy yourself for a month as you like?"

"No, thank you. I'll do as you propose. It is really a very sensible plan. I had no idea you would hit on anything so practical. When I feel in a better temper I'll thank you."

Assuring her she need not burden her memory with thanks, and recommending her to mention her new plans to Sarleigh and Mrs. Couton, he invited her to come and speak to his father in the garden. As they stepped out on the gravel-

led terrace, she stopped to look round at the smooth green lawns, the motley beds, the symmetrical terraces, the shrubs, and the avenue whose shades were growing deep and sombre.

"What a lovely place this is," she said.

"Could your thoughts lead to happier conclusions here," he asked.

"No, nowhere. How unkind of you to destroy my pleasure by reminding me of that."

The intention of his question quite escaped her, and the pleasure the pretty scene awaked had entirely vanished from her face.

Mr. Montenotte was delighted to see her. He gathered her a handsome bouquet, and laughed immoderately, in a mumbling, growling way, over his son's account of her encounter with Mr. Rowlands. Learning next that she had had nothing to eat since luncheon, he rated his son for his inconsiderateness in not offering her anything. All three returned to the house, where they found Mrs. Montenotte in the drawing-room. Not much pleased to see Bourbakhátzouli, this lady proposed, on hearing she was hungry, that she should have a cup of coffee and some thin bread and butter, which was standing ready on a small round table. But Mr. Monte-

notte, who had a great dislike to what he called "lap-food," was indignant that such meagre hospitality should be offered to any hungry soul, and, despite Miss Valettas' expostulations, insisted on her having a little supper with himself and his son in the dining-room. During the meal the young lady recovered her spirits, and related, to her host's intense amusement, first some of her convent experiences, and afterwards some of the manners and customs of Mr. and Mrs. Rowlands.

Nothing pleased Mr. Montenotte more than a strange piece of economy practised by the latter. When they went to a certain theatre, on arriving in the lobby, Mrs. Rowlands took off her cloak, and her husband ran with that and his own coat to a pawnbroker's hard by, and pawned both for a shilling each. The play over, whilst she waited again, he went and redeemed them. Thus he spent, instead of a shilling, only a penny on having the things taken care of during the play.

After supper Bourbachokátzouli, having long since recovered from her depression, asked Mr. Montenotte whether "he would be awfully shocked if she said she should like to smoke

a cigarette on the terrace before she left."

"You smoke, Miss Valettas? Come along. You are the only sensible young woman I know. I believe some girls smoke on the sly, but you're the first I've known have courage to own it. Hugh, get Miss Valettas some cigarettes."

She had her own. They went out on the terrace, and walked up and down for half an hour, she in the middle between the men. They smoked their cigars, and she her cigarettes. From the drawing-room windows Mrs. Montenotte saw the three figures in the gloom, and the three points of light, the middle one, that of a cigarette that was (merciful heavens!) in a woman's mouth. That infamous Miss Valettas! It was the first fall of the gentle summer night, a time for thoughts, not words. Gradually the conversation of the trio ceased, and they resigned themselves to the enjoyment of the silence, broken only by the sound of steps, the rustling of a dress, and the whispers of the wind in the tops of the trees.

Once, in the course of the half hour, Mrs. Montenotte came to the drawing-room window, and called her husband and son to her about some trivial matter. Bourbachokátzouli walked

on alone. When the two men turned away again from the drawing-room window, she was at the other end of the terrace, the red point of her cigarette showing brightly in the gloom.

"Hugh," said the old man, laying his hand on his son's shoulder, "marry that girl, if you can. I'll see that you shall be able to keep her."

"I mean to, father," replied the son, in a voice scarcely audible. He thought his father had not known his intention before.

Mr. Montenotte would have given Miss Valettas a bed. It was monstrous, he averred, when they could entertain her without inconvenience, to send her, tired as she must be, to pay for bed and breakfast more than she could afford. But Mrs. Montenotte would not consent, and he had to give way. Montenotte, before she left, insisted upon her coming to the studio to see some sketches for the new picture he was meditating. His father stood by, finding fault and criticising mercilessly. Paying little heed to that, Montenotte besieged his fair friend with volleys of questions as to what she thought, or liked, or wished, or would propose, till at last she stopped him.



"Indeed, I think," she said, "you are in danger of altogether spoiling your picture. It is useless trying to paint so as to please anyone but yourself. Do that, and I shall be happy to criticise and suggest, as will many of your other friends, cleverer than I. And perhaps that may help you. But we want you to succeed, not ourselves to be flattered."

"Hear, hear," said Mr. Montenotte.

His son was silent.

"Don't take amiss what I say," added Bourbachokátzouli, laying her hand on his arm, a familiarity she had never before allowed herself. "No one wishes you success more heartily than I, and if you try to paint only so as to please this person or that, I fear you will not succeed. Am I not right, Mr. Montenotte?"

"I think so," replied the old man, to whom she had appealed.

"I knew a man who did as you have bidden me do," replied the son, thoughtfully, "a man who loved his art for its own sake, and lived, moved, breathed in it."

"Did he not paint well?"

"He was a sculptor. His work was excellent, but he broke his wife's heart."

"How?"

"She said he cared more for his blocks of marble than for her, that he lived on dreams, and gave her nothing but his cares, and the dull hours, when he felt too tired to work. She doted on him, and died broken-hearted and broken-spirited."

"She may have died, but her heart was not broken," replied Bourbachokátzouli. "That woman never had a heart. Had she had one, she would have known how to be her husband's playmate when his brain was weary, and, when he was anxious, his best friend. And she would have been proud of his renown. *Then*, very likely, she would have had his real love, which, as it was, I think, she never merited, and possibly could not have understood."

"Are not women what their husbands make them?"

"I hope not," she replied, much more earnestly than she generally spoke. "Certainly fools are irremediably fools. But I know how you men think. There is, in your estimation, nothing like senseless love. A woman who calculates, though it is only how to make you happy, will always in your eyes be an actress."

No wonder there are so many fools in the world, when only foolish women are really loved."

## CHAPTER IX.

UNQUESTIONABLY the artist's advice had been opportune and to the point. Miss Valettas could scarcely do anything better than give music lessons to pupils who would pay her well. Conscious that her distaste for drudgery and regularity was the only thing that really deterred her from doing as Montenotte had proposed, she, after some thought, reluctantly resolved on another attempt to devote herself to work. According to his suggestion, therefore, the following day found her once more in the south-east of London. Mrs. Couton, on whom she called first, was out of town. From the vicarage it was but a short distance to Sarleigh's lodgings. He was having his luncheon when he heard the maid of all work exclaim, in surprise,

"Lor! miss, is it you?"

"Good morning, mon ami," said Bourbach-okátzouli, walking into his room a minute afterwards. "You see, I have come back again."

He replied he was delighted to see her, greeting her with a warm grasp of the hand and a smile of real welcome, and asked whether he might offer her some luncheon.

"Thanks. You see I always come to you hungry. Dear me, it does seem strange to be here again. It is like coming home." (She had seated herself in her old place by the fire.) "Why, you have altered the bookshelves. And, oh! Mr. Sarleigh, who is this excessively pretty young lady on your chimney-piece?"

It was his sister Ethel, he replied. Whilst Miss Valettas admired the portrait, Lucy made preparations for her luncheon. Sarleigh invited her to be seated at the table, apologizing for the frugal fare. Assuring him his excuses were unnecessary, she said,

"I want you to do something for me. First, I must tell you I have left Mrs. Rowlands."

"You have left? Why?"

"I had a misunderstanding, a 'row,' I think

a man would call it, with Mr. Rowlands, and they sent me away on the spot."

"That is awkward. What was the 'row' about?"

"I don't think it is any use to talk about that. The worst of it is, Mrs. Rowlands says she will not recommend me."

"And you want some new work?"

"I don't want to work, but I must."

Sarleigh wondered what it all meant: After a few minutes' thought, he said,

"You see, you went there without any testimonials, and they took you on our recommendation. Now you have been sent away for some reason you cannot explain. I think you will find it very difficult to get other work."

"You certainly know how to make one's prospects look cheerful."

"But is it not true?"

"So true that I fear I have wasted my time in coming to ask you to help me. Yet I will tell you what I propose to do. The Montnottes have been very kind to me. You know that. Last night, after this unfortunate affair, I went to Chiswick, and Mr. Montenotte advises me——"

"Which Mr. Montenotte? The old man or Hugh Montenotte?" asked Sarleigh, suspiciously.

"Mr. Hugh Montenotte."

"When you were sent away you went to him. Was he the reason why you were sent away?"

"Mr. Sarleigh!"

"Oh, I beg your pardon. Please don't be offended. Only I don't see what Hugh Montenotte can have to do with your plans."

"Mr. Montenotte and I are very good friends," replied Bourbachokátzouli, testily, "and he advises me to give private music lessons. The Montenottes will recommend me to their friends, and I came to ask you to recommend me too. I think the plan a very good one."

Sarleigh replied that he should be very happy to recommend her. He inquired how often she saw the Montenottes, and disbelieved her when she said "very seldom," and most sincerely believed her when she added, "She wished she saw them oftener." Plainly, the Montenottes, or, as Sarleigh suspected, Hugh Montenotte, occupied an important place in Miss

Valettas' plans. Whilst, on the score of appearances, the deacon had been refused all communication with his idol, the artist's advances had been permitted and encouraged. This seemed to Sarleigh very unjust, for he was Miss Valettas' saviour and champion, and the artist was only an interloper and very unscrupulous admirer. It was clearly high time to put an end to this unsatisfactory state of things. The young lady was now, at any rate, within his reach, and the curate resolved to seize the opportunity fortune vouchsafed him, and to strike a decisive blow.

His purpose was nothing less than proposing to Miss Valettas. That he would do in such passionate terms, with such appeals to her sense of gratitude, and such vows of eternal devotion, as no woman on earth could withstand. Time after time he had enacted the whole scene in his mind, from the words, "Miss Valettas, shall I ever call you by some dearer name?" with which he had determined to disclose the secret of his love, to the supreme instant when he would fold her in his arms, and call her, "Bourbachokátzouli, mine own." All her possible objections had been considered, and fitting



answers found to meet them. He had even bought the engaged ring, without knowing whether it would fit her. Certainly he had not contemplated venturing on the crucial question quite so soon, nor quite so abruptly. Fancy had pictured some idyllic preludes, shady groves, tinkling streams, tender looks, trembling words, and all the rest of it. But now grim necessity seemed to warn him that there was no time for play and parley, that, unless one bold stroke could win her, she would soon be for ever lost to him.

Strange indeed was the feeling that the critical moment was come! He felt very loth to begin. The immediate circumstances were not at all what he could desire. Miss Valettas was finishing her bread and cheese most unpoetically and unsuspectingly. To introduce the speech with which he designed to commence his declaration seemed well-nigh impossible. However, "faint heart never won fair lady," and well-weighed words are better than anything a timid man is likely on the spur of the moment to devise, and so, screwing up his courage, and the piece of the table-cloth he held in his hot hands, he cast indecision to the winds,

and plunged into the peril with the appalling audacity of a nervous man.

He turned to Bourbachokátzouli, and, with a forced smile, persuasively said,

“Miss Valettas, shall I ever call you by any dearer name?”

She put down the glass she was raising to her lips, and looked round at him in blank astonishment. His face still wore the would-be witching smile, but had become very red. What he meant, Miss Valettas had no more conception than if he had addressed her in Latin. Imagining that either her ears deceived her, or that he was making some allusion she had not understood, she discreetly said nothing. Though her cool, direct gaze disturbed him a trifle, the deacon repeated his question.

“Miss Valettas, shall I ever call you by any dearer name?”

“What on earth do you mean, Mr. Sarleigh?”

Oh, prophetic foresight of the cleric! In preparing his words, and picturing to himself what she might say, “What do you mean?” was the very question he had forecast: rather less bluntly asked than she asked it, it is true. Still he was prepared for “What do you mean?”

"Can you doubt what I mean?" he said, leaning towards her.

She drew back a little, and said,

"I don't know what you mean. What *do* you mean?"

He was prepared for that too, and replied,

"And can you ask me twice?"

"Are you subject to fits, Mr. Sarleigh?" she asked, rising from her chair.

He was not prepared for that. A vague notion flitted through his brain that a telling reply might be made about "fits of love," but as he could not at the moment see how to frame it he only answered, "Fits! no."

"You are not occasionally subject to mental aberration?"

"Mental aberration! No. Only—yes—my mind wanders after you."

That was not bad for a nervous man. Being also real and not made up beforehand it took effect too. Miss Valettas glanced at him and smiled. Then she turned her face away. "Of course," she thought, "he is going to propose. What a way of beginning! I really ought to stop it. But I should like to see how a clergyman makes love." So she looked at him, out

of the corners of her eyes, with the tiniest twinkle of a smile, and then again turned her face away.

The deacon was enraptured.

"Come, come," he said, setting a chair by the empty fireplace, "sit here—here, where you sat when you first came to me."

"But I have not finished my luncheon yet."

"Oh! never mind that."

"But, excuse me, I am hungry."

"And so am I, but not for food," said Sarleigh. He shook his head pathetically, and repeated, "Come and sit here."

She sat where he wished. He put his elbow on the chimney-piece, rested his head on his hand, and began a speech which, like the posture, had been studied.

"When you first came to me, that cold evening, hungry, weary, an outcast, to plead for some pity in the hour of your despair, little I thought of the"—"dazzling charm" came next in his speech, but it proved very hard to say. It stuck in his throat, and would not come out. Whilst he was thinking of something to take its place he lost the cue, and repeated, nervously—"I little thought, I little thought——"

"As far as I can remember, what you thought least of on that occasion was my respectability."

"Ah! but then I did not know you. Now—ah, yes, now!" (he had found the catch word of one of his speeches)—"now I have learned to value you, to know your worth, your wit, your genius. Now that I have seen what a"—"peerless lady" ought to follow. But few can say words of this sort in cold common speech, and the deacon found himself again at a loss. He continued, however, somehow, "What a—what a—how unlike other women——"

"Excuse me, may I ask a question?"

"You may ask me any question."

"Thanks. This reminds me of a rehearsal for private theatricals. Are you rehearsing a part?"

"A part of the drama of my life—and *yours*."

He tried to give the words effect with a pause, and a long drawl of the last word.

"Capital. That is the best piece you have said yet. But, kindly permit me, take your elbow off the chimney-piece, and hold your head up, so, and let that hand drop naturally. That is better. And speak a little faster. I'll stand here." She stood at a little distance from him,

half turned away, and looked over her shoulder, posing herself gracefully, and opening her fan. "Now go on. What shall I say? Speak, Sir Deacon?"

"But," said Sarleigh, "I want you to sit where you sat that first evening you came here."

"No, that won't do," replied his companion, relinquishing her theatrical pose. "You can't stand hanging over me like a hungry wolf, whilst I give myself a stiff neck with staring up into your face. Besides, I shall have my back to the audience, and all my pretty grimaces will be wasted."

"But I want you to sit there."

"I daresay you want me to sit there, only you make a mistake. Now be reasonable. You stand there, and I'll stand here. Or we can change over if you wish it. It must be properly done, or the whole thing will look ridiculous. Now I'll begin again. Speak on, Sir Deacon. Why don't you go on?"

"Miss Valettas, you are mocking me."

"You need not say 'Miss Valettas.' Never mind. Mocking you, sir!"

"Yes, and cruelly."

"Called cruel, and by you!"

She hung her head, and proceeded to draw her handkerchief from her pocket.

"Miss Valettas!"

"Yes. Won't that do?"

"This is no rehearsal, you know it is not. I am in earnest, and you are mocking me heartlessly."

"Not at all. I thought you were rehearsing something, now you say you are in earnest."

"I am. Sit there."

"No. I've gone through this innumerable times, and I know all about it. I know the way it ought to be done, and your way is not the right way."

"What have you gone through?"

"Proposals."

"But you never yet said 'Yes.'" He drew a little nearer as he spoke.

"Yes I have, and changed my mind, and altered it to 'No.'"

"But you never said the 'Yes' that cannot be changed to 'No.'"

"Ah! well, we will not talk about that."

"I wish to talk of it. That one little word that I——"

"You have your elbow on the chimney-piece again, Mr. Sarleigh."

"Nay, I'll not be put off like this," he said, commencing another of his speeches, of which he really had a wonderful repertoire. When it was ended, she only said,

"Now I am sure you either made that up before, or got it out of a book."

"I have thought much of every word I have to say to you."

"Then please get on a little faster."

But the truth was, he had not the courage to come to the end. He tried it once or twice, but when he arrived at the critical point in his speech, where the declaration was to follow, he shyed it. Realizing that without her assistance he would never get out what he wanted to say, Bourbachokátzouli, at last resolved to assist him, though she felt that her conduct was scarcely excusable.

He had explained for the fourth time that she was not meant to work, that people were not kind to her, did not trust her.

"Who could trust a poor, friendless, penniless girl like me?" she asked.

"I would trust you with my life and hopes."



"What reason could you have for trusting me so much?"

"Great reason. The greatest."

"And what is that?"

"You know."

She thought, "He certainly is hard to bring to the point," but she hung her head, and coyly said, "Can you not name it?"

Even so he could scarcely find courage to breathe the one word "Love."

Bourbachokátzouli sat motionless. He knelt and put his hands in her lap. "I love you," he said, "tell me that you love me." It was not premeditated, and was bravely said. She was sorry then she had played with him.

"I cannot tell you that, Mr. Sarleigh," she said, gently, "for it would not be true. Rise, pray, and forgive me for letting you say what you have honoured me by saying."

He did not move, but continued. "You do not know how I love you, or you would not have been so heartless with me."

She rose, pushing back her seat, and held out her hand to raise him up, saying, "Rise, Mr. Sarleigh, please. You are distressing me."

He rose then, and she went on, "There, you are mon bon ami. I owe you more than I can tell. Be content with that."

"Will you not even give me hope?" he pleaded. "I have loved you so! All I have is yours, my life, and a life-long love. What will any other give you?"

"I might say all that and other things that you cannot give. But do not let us talk of this. I cannot give you hope, I must say no."

"Why?"

"Really, sir, you are the most interrogative person I ever met. Are you actually asking a lady to state her reasons for refusing you?"

"You are at play again. I am in earnest."

"Then leave earnest, and join me in play."

He turned from her, and sinking into his arm-chair, hung his head, and covered his face and eyes with his hands. From time to time a sigh like that of a man oppressed with a lone grief escaped him. Miss Valettas stood near, curiously regarding him. She had seen a refused man turn from her with an ashy face, and hard set features, and never a word but "Adieu, Mademoiselle!" said in a tone that made her heart ache for him. And she had

seen another under the same circumstances start up from where he knelt at her feet, and curse her to her face, with such fearful words that she paled and turned faint. She understood them both, and whoever she loves, will never forget their love, but the deacon's despondent sighs, ostentatiously exhibiting his helplessness in her presence, appeared to her contemptible.

No ringing laugh, however, gave expression to her amused disdain, as six months before it would certainly have done. Mingled thoughts of pity, regret, remorse, amusement, pain, followed each other in hurried succession, making themselves seen in her changeful features and restless eyes, but all too indistinct for utterance. One thought mastered all others, the strange consciousness of herself being altered, of scarcely understanding the unwonted feelings that wrought in her the reckless *railleuse*. At last, saying to herself, "I have given evil for good," she approached Sarleigh, and, putting her hand on his shoulder, said,

"Mon ami."

He looked up.

"This is not manly. I am sorry I have

pained you, who have been so good to me. But you must bear it better than this."

"It does not matter to you," he answered, hanging his head again. "What is my pain to you?"

"Pain, mon ami! Not many women would speak to you as frankly as I. It is more frankly than you deserve. I am a Romanist, you an English clergyman. I should be miserable married to a clergyman. You cannot see it. I can. I do not love you, that is not my fault. Could you love anyone just because they said to you, 'I love you'?"

"But women with any self-respect never do say that to a man," replied the deacon, looking up suddenly with the air of a man who had hit upon an idea.

"Mon ami, you are impracticable."

She went and sat down in the window, turning her back to him, and thinking, "That is what women get for prating with a man after refusing him." When another five minutes had elapsed, the deacon, having heaved many more sighs, she said, without looking round,

"Mr. Sarleigh, I am going back to my hotel."

There was no answer.

"And I wish you to understand that, if I am to be treated like this any longer, not only do I never come to see you again, but the next time I meet you I cut you."

He came to her then, hanging his head, the very impersonification of woe.

"Well, sir?"

"Oh, Miss Valettas," he commenced, in a plaintive voice.

"Stop!" she said, holding up her hand. "I see I must again remind you not to be so discourteous as to continue a subject of conversation a lady has assured you displeases her. If you are intending this discourtesy, I go, and we do not meet again. If you are going to be sensible, I shall be happy to talk to you."

He made her no answer, but showed, by commencing, after a short silence, some conversation on an indifferent topic, that he meant to comply with her wishes. Uppermost in his mind was the idea of getting her away from Montenotte. It was with this view that he suggested before long a visit to his mother at Nanham. "He had meant," he said, "to get her asked there; but now, of course——"

"Of course what, now?"

"You would not go."

"I should if I were invited, and I should enjoy it very much. Your sister and I correspond, and I should like to see her. I shall have little chance of getting more work till the autumn, and I should very much like to go out of town for a change. Why do you look surprised?"

"I thought, after what I said to you just now, you would not like to go. I should like it so much if you would go. I should try to get my holiday at the same time, and come into the country to join you."

"Do."

The absolute oblivion in which she buried what had passed puzzled him, as it always puzzles men brought for the first time face to face with that bottomless abyss, wilful oblivion feminine. She talked pleasantly of little reminiscences of her previous stay at Bermondsey, inquired after Mr. and Mrs. Couton, and was interested to hear an account of Sister Martha's funeral. After a time, she took out her purse, and, extracting from it a small bundle of notes, unfolded them in her lap.

"I know," she said, "that you will not think

it strange I should not return to you at once all the large sum I owe you. Your kindness will permit me to remain a little longer in your debt. But a part I can afford to pay off. If you will permit me, I should like to do so. Will you, at the same time, give this to the Mother Superior of the Sisterhood? It will pay the Sisters for all I cost them, not in annoyances, but in money, and I shall be glad to feel out of debt to them."

"Are you sure you can spare all this now?" he asked, as he took the notes.

"Easily."

"You have not earned all this by teaching," he said, anxiously.

"No. But——"

"Yes?" said Sarleigh, interrogatively.

"Exactly so," replied Bourbachokátzouli, and began to laugh.

She saw that some horrible suspicion again had hold of the deacon's mind. He had seen how well she was dressed. He knew that some of her jewelry was new. All could not have been purchased out of her miserable salary. And she was abundantly supplied with money.

Whence did it all come? He could not but speak.

"Miss Valettas," he said, "does Montenotte give you money?"

He thought she paled for an instant. She said, indifferently, "You are very rude!"

"I don't want to make you angry, but I do care for your reputation," he replied.

"Then I wish, *mon ami*, you had a little more delicacy in the way you show your regard for me."

She treated him like a child. He was conscious of it, and detested it, the more because he knew he could not help it. She had made herself entirely mistress of him, and mercilessly snubbed him the moment he tried to assert himself. Even a direct insult from him scarcely seriously angered her.

Before her departure, she condescended to partake of afternoon tea. As she was buttoning her gloves, she said,

"Be sure you get me an invitation to Nanham. And excuse my mentioning it, but next time you want to do what you did over there," she pointed to the place where he had proposed



to her, "don't get up your speeches beforehand. It has a more ridiculous effect than you can imagine. Good-bye. I am very glad I was fortunate enough to find you at home."

She left him speechless and crimson.

## CHAPTER X.

UNHESITATINGLY as Sarleigh had promised his friend an invitation to his mother's house, he anticipated considerable difficulties in getting it. In this he was right. On the other hand, however arduous the project, he was determined on carrying it out.

There are families in which one member always gets his or her way, let the rest wish what they will. Households there are where those that are younger rule, and their elders obey, under protest always, but, in the end, very submissively. Everyone who knows them notices it, and some thoughtless people say, "I cannot imagine why Mrs. A. gives way in the fashion she does to her daughters," or "I am at a loss to know why those nice girls let their selfish sister domineer over them all." Here,

then, is the reason : it is done to save trouble.

Human beings avoid every avoidable inconvenience, and few indeed have the courage to endure a little more annoyance to-day, for the sake of encountering much less three months hence. Man, bent on gliding through life with the minimum of vexation, selects the nearest available declivity as unsuspectingly as water. The hundreds of young people to be daily seen managing their fathers and mothers, or uncles and aunts, know nothing of all this musty philosophy. Selfish brothers and tyrannical sisters have only vaguely apprehended it. But Nature has bestowed an instinctive skill to overcome on creatures produced to survive, and prompts them to act with unerring pertinacity in the way most conducive to their own superiority.

Resolved to obtain the coveted invitation, Sarleigh gave himself a good deal of pains to consider how he could best secure it. The most obvious thing was to write to his mother, requesting her to ask Miss Valettas to spend a few weeks at Nanham, and to trust to his wishes having sufficient weight to procure the invitation. Of the results of this plan he did

not feel sufficiently sure to hazard it. He pursued a course entirely different. The real mistress at Nanham was Ethel. How that was, in strict accordance with the principles above mentioned, will shortly be seen. If Ethel wished Miss Valettas' visit, somehow, it would, undoubtedly, be brought about. Ethel had said, a good many weeks before this, that she should like to see Miss Valettas, but her wishes changed often and rapidly, and her brother had reasons to suspect she resented Alice's exclusive claim to be "Miss Valettas' friend," and would, on that account, be inclined to gainsay rather than forward that lady's visit to Nanham. But like other potentates, Ethel could generally be propitiated by a meek confession of her power. Of this fact her brother was far from ignorant. She had another weakness, an innate interest in love affairs. Taking these things into consideration, Sarleigh thought he saw how to effect his purpose.

He wrote to Ethel.

"DEAR ETHEL,

"I wish I could see you, and talk with you about Bourbachokátzouli Valettas. You

will be able to guess what I mean. She has holidays now. I wish mother would invite her to spend a month at Nanham. Do you think I might venture to write and ask mother to invite her? If so, do give me a hint as to your own plans. I want *you* to be at home when Miss Valettas is there. I wish you to see her, know her, judge of her. She writes to Alice. As you know, there are things about which it is useless to write to Alice. She does not understand them. Please give me your advice. I know Miss Valettas would come, if she were asked. As I am anxious for your answer, telegraph.

“Your affectionate brother,

“F. S.

“P.S.—I enclose four shillings for the telegram.”

This letter, which Sarleigh spent some time in contriving, produced the desired result. It raised his sister's curiosity to fever heat, enlisted her good will, and, most important of all, excited in her an eager desire of seeing her future sister-in-law. She enjoyed the tiny excitement of having to telegraph, and, as she was always

short of cash, was particularly touched by her brother's considerateness in sending more than enough to pay for telegraphing.

The following morning he received her reply, bidding him write to his mother and Alice. Ethel would pretend to know nothing, but would forward his wishes. He was to name an early date for the visit. Ethel was *dying* to see Miss Valettas, and wished her brother to send her a long letter, containing every particular of what had occurred.

The deacon wrote as advised, to his mother requesting her to invite Miss Valettas, to Alice begging her to second his request. A third letter to Ethel contained a long account of Miss Valettas' charms and virtues, and an insinuation that, though not "definitely accepted," the deacon "had hopes." He further hinted that much depended on the invitation he was seeking, and on the reception the young lady met with at Nanham, where he hoped to join her. After this Sarleigh felt, in his own mind, secure that Miss Valettas would be invited.

The three missives arrived at Nanham in the evening. Ethel put hers in her pocket, and watched her mother's face whilst she read. The

pleasant smile with which the old lady had welcomed her son's handwriting soon disappeared. The letter perused, she folded it up, and put it into her work-basket in silence. Her secret intention was to send her son, the next morning, a very sharp refusal, and to say nothing to the girls about the contents of his letter. But Alice looked up from the pages of hers, and said,

"Oh! mamma, Fred has written to ask you to invite Miss Valettas to visit us."

Mrs. Sarleigh shuffled impatiently in her seat, but made no reply.

"What is that?" said Lilian, who was reading in the window. "Is Fred going to send Beelzebubina down here?"

Ethel, who was watching every word, now saw how the first point might be gained by securing Lilian's opposition, to which Mrs. Sarleigh was always opposed.

"Oh! Lily," she exclaimed, "don't you hope she will come?"

"No, I don't," replied Lilian, "though I dare say mamma will ask her, if Fred wishes it."

"Mamma invites people or not, as she pleases," said Ethel.

Lilian whistled. This trick particularly irritated Mrs. Sarleigh, who, being already cross, soundly rated Lilian, for the next three or four minutes, to Ethel's heart's content. In the interim Alice had finished her letter. She now asked,

"Shall you invite her, mamma?"

"I don't know, my dear. I must think it over."

"She always writes very nicely, quiet, lady-like letters. I should like to see her. Still, of course, we know nothing about her."

"You think her an impostor, don't you, Lily?" said Ethel.

"Oh! I shan't say anything, thank you. If I do, it's sure to be wrong."

"If you don't think her an impostor, why do you always call her Miss Walters?"

Lilian said nothing.

"You are a nice girl to talk to, Lily. First you contradict, and afterwards you won't answer."

"Why don't you answer your sister, Lilian?" said Mrs. Sarleigh.

"Because she is trying 'to entangle me in my talk.'"



"I will not have you quote the Scriptures in this profane way, miss."

"Won't you?"

Lilian was ordered out of the room. She took up her book and departed. Silence ensued. Respect for her mother's wishes prevented Alice, the instinct of diplomacy Ethel, from alluding to the invitation. When, after an interval, the conversation re-commenced, its subject was an entirely indifferent topic.

On retiring to her room, Mrs. Sarleigh, as usual, requested Ethel, of whom she invariably made a confidante, to accompany her. But, contrary to her usual practice, instead of discussing her intentions with her favourite daughter, and asking her opinion and wishes, she simply told her what she meant to do. She had determined not to invite Miss Valettas, and intended, also, on the following morning, to send her son "a piece of her mind." Ethel concluded, and rightly, that her mother felt very strongly on the subject.

After leaving her she went to Alice's room. Alice was already in bed, and nearly asleep. Though she pleaded fatigue, and reminded her younger sister of her mother's particular dislike

to nocturnal consultations, she had to recover her waking senses sufficiently to understand what Ethel wished, and to decide whether she would second her plans.

"Mamma," said Ethel, "says she won't invite Miss Valettas, and that she means to scold Fred for proposing such a thing. I think it hard on Fred, who likes Miss Valettas, and I want to see her myself. It is very likely she will some day be our sister. Now, Alice, will you help me to persuade mamma to ask her."

Alice thought a little, then she said,

"No, Ethel, I won't. We don't know enough about Miss Valettas to be able to ask her here. As for Fred's liking her, it will be time enough for mamma to think about that when he tells her of it."

"Then you are going to side with Lily against me."

"I am not siding with anyone. I only say mamma has a right to do as she likes."

"And you are Miss Valettas' *friend*!"

"I don't see what that has to do with it."

"It seems to me it ought to have a great deal to do with it. At any rate, it shows you are as false as Lily says friends always are."

"I think you are siding with Lily now."

"Help me to persuade mammy."

"No, Ethel, I won't."

"Very well, Alice. Now listen. I have mammy, and you, and Lily against me. Miss Valettas *shall come*."

With his mother's four pages of angry and querulous repudiation of his request the deacon received, the next morning, a short letter from Ethel.

"DEAR FRED,

"Mamma and Alice and Lily are all determined Miss Valettas shall not be invited. Don't be alarmed. I'll soon make them change their minds. Yours,

"ETHEL."

The contest began at luncheon. Ethel came in late, sat down with her hat on, and ate a few mouthfuls of cold meat and a piece of bread without uttering a word. Then she rose, and left the room. The sound of the front door closing behind her showed she had gone out again.

"What is the matter with Ethel?" asked Mrs. Sarleigh, looking alarmed.

"Sulks," said Lillian.

"I am sure I cannot imagine," said Alice, "she has not spoken to me since breakfast."

At half-past four Ethel came in for afternoon tea. She complained of being hot and tired, and her looks bore testimony to the truth of her words. She had been, she said, to half the shops in the town for something she wanted. Alice had driven into the town in the pony-carriage, and Mrs. Sarleigh inquired why Ethel had not accompanied her, or asked her to do her errands.

"Alice won't do anything I ask her now," said Ethel.

When Alice returned, she accordingly received a scolding from her mother for unkindness to Ethel. Ethel kept out of sight till dinner-time. On the stairs, as she was coming down to dinner, Alice overtook her, and commenced apologizing for not having asked her to go with her in the pony-carriage. Ethel, paying no attention to what was said, interrupted her,

"I saw Mr. Austen in the town."

Alice coloured.

"He asked something about you, and wanted

me to bring you a message. You will do nothing to please me, so I don't see why I should do anything to please you. I told him I would rather not be the bearer of messages. I said, 'Mr. Austen, why do you want to send messages to my sister? If a gentleman I could name were to know of it, consequences would follow for which my sister would not thank you.' He looked awfully queer at that, I assure you."

"Oh! Ethel, what have you done?"

"Only declined to do things for you. You will do nothing to please me."

During dinner it was Alice's turn to be silent. Ethel talked a good deal about people she had met in the town, especially a Mrs. Fegan and her sons. They had invited her to luncheon the following day.

"I hope you declined," said her mother, "they are very strange people."

Ethel said she had accepted. After dinner Alice, who was desperately in love with George Austen, implored Ethel to bestow a little consideration upon the possible consequences of such a speech as she had made her sister's suitor. Ethel replied it was a jest. She had

as much right to enjoy a joke as anyone. Further, she threatened a similar pleasantry at the earliest opportunity. Alice cried. Ethel was inexorable. At last poor Alice, after some bootless supplications not to be compelled to do what she thought wrong, finding she had to choose between obedience to the dictates of her heart and those of her conscience, chose, like a weak woman, to sacrifice the latter. She promised to help to get Miss Valettas invited, if only her sister would not interfere with her love affairs.

"Ah, that's it," said Ethel. "If you had said that last night, I would have said something neat for you to-day. I could have. Mr. Austen gave me an opportunity. But now I am perfectly capable of managing my own business, thank you, and can get Miss Valettas invited without your help. Only, if you try to thwart me, take care."

"Ethel dear," said Mrs. Sarleigh, in the evening, whilst her daughter was helping her to undress, "you have not been like yourself to-day. Is anything wrong, dear?"

"No, mamma."

"There is, I am sure. You have scarcely

spoken, except at dinner. You have been looking vexed and distressed all day. And you did not dress for dinner. Tell me what it is, my love. Has Alice been unkind to you, or Lilian?"

"No, mamma."

"What is the matter, then?"

"Nothing, mammy dear. Good night."

"Why don't you tell me, my pet?"

"It is nothing, mamma."

"Tell me, Ethel dear, do."

The girl stood hanging her head for a minute, then she suddenly pulled out her handkerchief, and, after rubbing her eyes, looked up with a smile and said,

"It is nothing, mamma."

"Dear, you are crying. Do, do tell me," said Mrs. Sarleigh, who could not bear the idea of Ethel being in tears.

"No, mamma, I won't tell you. You are too good to me, and I never, never will say anything you do not like, only, only"—she sat down and hid her face again in her handkerchief—"I am sorry you should side with Lily against me. You never did before."

"My love, you must be beside yourself. I side with Lilian against you!"

"About Miss Valettas."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Sarleigh, coldly. "But you don't wish her to come, I'm sure."

"I don't wish anything you don't wish, mammy dear, only I should have liked to see her. And I don't like your siding with Lily against me."

Ethel began to sob.

"It is nothing to do with Lilian, dear. Don't cry, Ethel. I don't know this woman, and am very sorry Fred is so infatuated about her. Don't cry, love."

"I—think—Fred—is very fond—of her—and of——" said Ethel, sobbing between the words.

"Nonsense, Ethel!"

"Well, mamma, you have made me say it. I did not mean to tell you. I thought you would ask her. You know I cannot bear being disappointed, and I cannot help seeing you do side with Lily, and that nobody wishes what I wish."

Having got thus far, the young lady consented to be pacified. The tears she had produced by a sufficiently persevering attempt to sob were dried up, and she went to her own room a picture of very pretty, patient disconsolate-



ness. Mrs. Sarleigh had not shown any disposition to alter her mind about Miss Valettas, but she knew that her resolution had received a serious shock. It was very easy to tell Ethel she must get over her disappointment, but the old lady knew she should never be able to go through such another scene of tears and despair as this.

In the middle of breakfast the next morning, Ethel said,

"I suppose Fred has your letter by this time, mamma. He will be a good deal disappointed, poor fellow! I rather wish we could have asked Miss Valettas. Don't you, Alice?"

"I wish things could have been so that we could ask her, if Fred wishes it," said Alice, cautiously and timidly.

"You don't agree with me, do you, Lily?" asked Ethel.

"No, I don't."

"And as mamma agrees with——"

Ethel looked at her mother. Twelve hours before, Mrs. Sarleigh would have said, "I agree with Lillian." Now she dare not, and only said, "There, there, dears, we won't talk about that."

Ethel went to the telegraph-office after breakfast, and telegraphed to her brother :

“Telegraph this afternoon about four to Alice. Say, ‘I am so grieved. Try to persuade mother before Miss Valettas accepts another invitation.’”

Then she spent the time in shopping till the hour for luncheon at the Fegans’ arrived. At half-past four a telegram was brought to Grove Lodge. Everyone was out, and the messenger waited. As Ethel had foreseen, Mrs. Sarleigh came home first.

The old lady came along the drive towards her door with short, lagging steps. She stopped on her way to poke over some flowers with the end of her sunshade, and with a good deal of difficulty stooped to pick two or three remarkably handsome carnations. She meant to make of them a tiny bunch for Ethel to put in her bosom at dinner-time. She would put them on her girl’s dressing-table, that she might find them on her return. Then she made her slow way to the door, leisurely wiped her feet, and entered the hall. There, right before her, sat the telegraph-boy, with his cap in his lap. The old lady’s heart leapt with instantaneous fear.

"You are not a telegraph-boy?" she gasped.

"Yes, ma'am."

"You have not brought a telegraph here?"

"Yes, ma'am," and he handed it her.

She took it hastily, her heart beating a hundred strokes a minute, and her legs trembling under her, and went with it towards the drawing-room. Then she turned back, and walked half way across the hall in the opposite direction, then went to the foot of the stairs, where she called, "Alice, Alice, Ethel, Lilian," and, receiving no answer, moaned, "Oh! dear, oh! dear, what shall I do!"

Some of the servants had seen her returning, and one now came to explain that the telegram had arrived at half-past four, and that none of the young ladies were at home. Despatching two of her maids to the town to seek for her daughters, the poor old soul went into the breakfast-room, where she sat gazing at the brown envelope in her hand. What could it contain? Bad news, of course. There is nothing over which an old woman frets so much as over an unopened telegram. Mrs. Sarleigh was sure something sinister had befallen Fred,

or Ethel, or Alice, or Lilian. They were all out, and she could not tell which it might be. If anything had happened to Fred or Ethel, how she would grieve that she had refused their last wish. She presented a truly ridiculous spectacle, sitting, half crying, panting for breath, turning over and over in her quivering fingers the envelope she had not the courage to open. Yet what she suffered was something very piteous, and cruelly hard to bear.

At length Alice returned. Laughing at her mother's fears, she tore the envelope, and read its contents, to Mrs. Sarleigh's great relief. Nothing passed between them concerning the wish the deacon expressed.

Dinner-time came, and Ethel had not returned. During dinner another telegram arrived. It was directed to Mrs. Sarleigh. Under the circumstances of Ethel's unexplained absence, her mother could only imagine it was to announce her death under the wheels of a train, or in the middle of a house on fire. She insisted it should not be opened till she had left the room. It only announced that Ethel would dine at Mrs. Fegan's, but it proved a sore trial to Mrs. Sarleigh's already

shaken nerves. At nine o'clock came a third from Mrs. Fegan.

"We will drive Miss Sarleigh home. Do not be alarmed."

"Something has happened, I know," cried Mrs. Sarleigh. "My poor girl! my poor girl! They have taken no care of her, and dare not tell me how much she is hurt. Oh, my poor girl! What shall I do?"

After this she became quite unmanageable, wandering about the rooms, or sitting, rocking herself, first on one chair, then on another, crying, and wringing her hands, accusing herself of having driven her girl out of the house by her unkindness, and so being the wretched cause of she knew not what misfortunes.

When at eleven o'clock Ethel returned, safe and sound, she received a welcome even more unmerited than the prodigal's. Amidst her mother's kisses and caresses and entreaties never to leave her again, she announced that Mrs. Fegan had invited her to spend a month with a party in Switzerland. Every peril and every horror, of sea, land, mountain, plain, river and rail, came at once into Mrs. Sarleigh's tortured memory. Ethel must not, could not,

should not go. She would die of fright before her return.

"But, mamma, what am I to say to Mrs. Fegan. I should like to go. It is a chance many girls don't get. And I cannot say I am engaged."

"My darling, you don't know what I have endured to-day. I cannot let you go."

"Then, mammy, you must make some excuse for my refusing. What reason can we give for my staying at home?"

"Dear, if you'll promise not to go, I'll invite Miss Valettas, and you can say you must stay at home to entertain her."

As Alice was doing up her hair for the night, Ethel came into her room. An open letter was in her hand.

"MY DEAR MISS VALETTAS,

"My son tells me you have holidays at present. Since he first met you he has often written to us about you, and my daughters have frequently wished to see you. Would you come and spend a month with us? The country air will do you good, and we shall be able to offer you plenty of amusements, which

will be a pleasant change for you, after your work in London. If you can, come early next week. You must not think you are coming among strangers, but to some of the oldest friends you have in England.

“ With kind regards,

“ Yours very truly,

“ EMILY SARLEIGH.”

“ Now,” said Ethel, “ don’t you call that cordial? I dictated it. I told you she should come.”

## CHAPTER XI.

THE invitation Bourbachokátzouli had scarcely entertained hopes of receiving, she accepted with alacrity. Nothing could have been more to her taste than this unexpected month's holiday in the quickening country air, with nothing to think of, but how to get the most enjoyment out of the hours as they succeeded each other. Not the faintest suspicion entered her thought of the danger of committing herself in those unguarded hours, spent in the company of quick-witted girls. She did not observe that all those with whom she had been associated lately, were persons in whose presence she was naturally on her guard, gentlemen, strangers, employers, pupils, foes. In consequence, the peril for her, of an unconstrained intercourse with friends, girls, equals,



was entirely overlooked. So powerless is all experience to cure the strange disease of human short-sightedness. All Bourbachokátzouli foresaw were the amusements, pleasures, and distractions to which she had been always so passionately attached.

Only a week intervened between her leaving Mr. Rowlands' and going down to Nanham. The greater part of it was spent in such preparations for a month in the country as any girl with a little money to spare would make. Her friends saw little of her. Montenotte bade her "good-bye" anxiously and reluctantly. Her going away it was selfish to regret and impossible to like. Yet he concealed his mortification, partly because he thought it ungenerous, partly because he feared to re-awaken her suspicions of the character of his "friendship." Sarleigh saw her off, hovering round her with a nervous officiousness that made her wish him anywhere else.

The extremely rapid motion of a fast train provokes a sense both of excitement and abandon. For highly wrought and capricious temperaments, this mixed sensation has a charm that is unique, and Miss Valettas thoroughly

enjoyed her journey, for which Sarleigh's gratuity to the guard secured her a compartment to herself.

It was a glorious July day after a wet night that had laid the dust, and made everything fresh and bright. The country seemed to laugh in the summer sunshine, as corn-land and meadow, hedge and road, copse and orchard, cottage and town flew by. The light sparkled on everything: on the water in the mill-streams, on the windows of the houses, on the harness of the horses in the roads, on the faces of the children that stood and clapped their hands and shouted at the train, on the rails, on the signals, and on a hundred things in every station the train thundered through. A dead calm reigned in the sunlit air. In the open country, the motionless shadows of the trees fell dark and heavy on the green of the meadows. No breath moved the heads of the flowering reeds. The cattle lay idly in the shade. Old grand-dames, with their hands in their laps, sat at the cottage doors. And over all lay summer's garb of flowers, in the humble cotter's garden, in the lone hedges, around the dainty villas, and the thriv-

ing farms, even on the smoke-stained cuttings and embankments. The draught made by the moving train beat softly in Bourbachokátzouli's face, and played with her laces and bows, whilst she breathed freely and more freely every mile the train bore her away from town.

The girls met her at the station. Alice and Ethel hoped Lilian would not have accompanied them, but she had far too keen a sense of where she was not wanted to keep away. Whilst they waited for the train George Austen came on the platform, and, seeing the girls, joined them. He was a strongly-built man of middle height, with dark brown hair, and the bluff, good-natured expression of a healthy, brainless fellow devoted to shooting, hunting, riding, driving, and everything else done in the open air. Alice, whom he had not seen since Ethel had done her ill-natured best to create a misunderstanding between them, was both bent on getting a tête-à-tête and fearful about its result. Ethel would have left them to themselves; not so Lilian. The little group therefore kept together. The lovers both felt very uncomfortable. Ethel, by talking of the new friend they had come to meet, tried to keep some conversa-

tion going. Lilian, thoroughly enjoying the annoyance of the other three, vented her spiteful observations, whenever an opportunity presented itself. When the train was signalled, they were discussing whether Miss Valettas would come first or second class.

"Seeing," said Lilian, "she was a starving beggar when my brother picked her out of the gutter, I'll bet you anything you like she'll come first."

Ethel attempted to give Lilian a hint to beware what she was saying before Mr. Austen. Alice, all the time thinking of something else, only answered, "Yes, I daresay."

"If you are so sure she will come first, Lily," said Ethel, "do you look out for her in the middle of the train. I think she will come second, and shall wait here."

"I look for her! No, thank you. I shall see plenty of her before she's gone again: as you will, and Alice too most likely, though you don't think it."

The train came in. The three minutes' confused scramble on the platform commenced. No young lady alighted from the second-class carriages in front. Ethel and Alice hurried to

the other end of the train. As they hastened past, a tall, unusually well-dressed girl stepped out of a first-class carriage immediately in front of them, and Ethel said, "Look at that girl's feet, Alice. What lovely French boots she has!" A good many people stood by the last two carriages, amongst them a shabby-looking girl with a flushed face, who had just got out of the train. They were on the point of addressing her (feeling very uncomfortable about her unprepossessing appearance) when they heard a man call her Mrs. Cowry. Then they went to the extreme end of the train, and there stopped to think.

"Has she come after all?" said Ethel. The train was again in motion.

The girls turned back, walking slowly down the platform, which was already clearing. Lilian still stood by Mr. Austen, where they had left them at the further end of the station.

"There is that tall girl I saw get out of the first-class carriage, Alice. Do you see how beautifully she is dressed?"

"Ah, yes."

"I wonder who she is."

"I wonder where Miss Valettas is."

"You don't think it possible that is Miss Valettas."

"Impossible, quite. She is coming this way."

"I shall go and speak to her."

"No, don't, it cannot be——"

Ethel had already stepped forward. The little coquette's walk was pretty, but unmistakeably vain. When she was about three steps from the stranger, the latter bowed and said,

"Miss Ethel Sarleigh, I am sure."

"Miss Valettas?"

"Yes."

"I am so glad to see you," said Ethel, offering her hand. "How did you know me?"

"I have seen your photograph, which it would not be easy to forget."

She had seen Ethel's vanity too, and had time to determine to flatter it. Ethel looked immensely pleased. Alice came up and cordially shook hands with her friend.

"I think," she said, "I might claim the privilege of introducing you to my sisters."

"You have indeed a right to claim that," replied Miss Valettas, whose face at the same

instant changed from a pleasant smile to the deepest thoughtfulness in a manner that surprised both Alice and Ethel.

By this time Lilian and Mr. Austen had joined them. Alice introduced the former as "My sister Lilian." Miss Valettas, seeing Lilian did not mean to shake hands, returned her awkward bow stiffly.

"My sister did not mention your name," said Lilian. "May I ask what it is?"

"Valettas," replied her new acquaintance, looking a trifle surprised.

"Is that your real name? So many of my brother's friends have several names. I daresay you know that."

"I have another," replied Miss Valettas, controlling her indignation, but unable to master the colour that came into her cheeks, "but it is rather long, Bourbachokátzouli."

"Bourbachokátzouli! I had an idea it was something else," said Lilian.

Alice hastily and wisely interposed, by introducing Austen. Ethel suggested they should walk to the house. Miss Valettas acquiesced. Necessary arrangements about luggage concluded, the party left the station. The way,

which lay along a foot-path beside the road, shaded with elm-trees, was pleasantly cool. Before they had gone far Alice dropped behind with Austen, and was soon a long distance in the rear. Ethel walked between her new acquaintance and her sister. The last was now more interested in a cursory examination of Miss Valettas than in interfering between Alice and her lover.

By the time the three girls had arrived at the gate, Ethel had come to the conclusion that Miss Valettas was "charming," Lilian that she was an ordinary fashionable fool. Bourbachokátzouli, on the other hand, had deciphered Ethel before she spoke to her, and was still unable to come to any decision regarding Lilian, beyond the obvious facts that she was plain, shabby, and very rude. Neither of the sisters seemed like their brother. They stopped at the gate to wait for Alice, who, with Austen, came on only very slowly. When at last these two joined the others, Alice's face still bore traces of recent blushes. Austen shook hands with Ethel, and, after bowing to Lilian and Miss Valettas, reserved his last farewell for Alice, and contrived, after the others had turned away,



to find time for a long pressure of her hand, and to call her "love."

Mrs. Sarleigh's reception of Miss Valettas, though rather colder than the latter had a right to expect, from the tenor of her note, was kind and courteous. She offered her some refreshment, which was declined, and, after a little chat, sent one of the servants to assist her in unpacking.

Bourbachokátzouli's bed-room was that next Ethel's. Like it, it had windows opening on the balcony over the verandah. These windows commanded a view of the lawn, the fields beyond, the river running among meadows and trees, still further off, woods and arable land, and hills looking blue in the distance. Its polished pine furniture, pale-tinted wall-paper, muslin curtains and snow-white linen, gave it a delicious air of coolness and freshness. Alice introduced her friend to her new domain. She was about to leave her, when she came back from the door, and said,

"I cannot go without telling you how pleased I am to see you, Miss Valettas. I have so often thought of you, and wondered what you were like, and wished I could do something to add

to your happiness, and to let you see we English can be kind to strangers. Now you are come to stay with us, you must know you are very, very welcome" (she put her arms round Bourbachokátzouli, and, drawing her to her, lifted up her face and kissed her), "and you must try to be very happy here. We mean to do all we can to make you forget all your troubles, and to be real good kind friends to you."

The words came from the very fulness of her heart, always a gentle, tender heart, but now beating with that happiness of newly-plighted love's first joy, which fills all the world with sunshine. It was easy to see Alice only said a part of what she felt of kindly wishes and goodwill.

"You are kind and good," replied her friend. "I am sure I shall be happy here."

"That is right, dear. Join us on the lawn as soon as you can."

Alice left her. She was longing for a few minutes' solitude, in which to try to understand her own great happiness. She went to her room, and threw herself into the corner of her sofa. There, with hands folded on her bosom,

and her head drooping over them, she found vent for her feelings in words.

"I am so happy, so happy. He loves me!"

Her sweet hope was accomplished, all doubts past, and quiet certainty came all smiles.

"How good I will be to him!" she thought.

"How I will strive to deserve his love, to be all a woman should be to the man who loves her. So faithful, so loving, so gentle, brave if there is trouble to be borne, and patient when he is vexed. Oh, I am so happy! Dear love, you have made me so happy!"

After a time she joined Ethel on the lawn.

"Well, Alice," said the latter, "don't you feel awfully happy?"

"Who told you, Ethel?"

"Told! Do you think I am blind? Let me congratulate you, dear. I wish you everything you can wish yourself."

"Ethel, I am so happy," said the elder sister, pensively.

"Of course you are," replied the younger, jocosely.

"He loves me, Ethel, oh! you cannot think how much. It *was* cruel of you to speak to him in the way you did the other day. He told me

he thought he should never feel happy again."

"I daresay it helped to bring him to the point. I am glad it has come about, if you are pleased. My first affair lasted three weeks. The first ten days I felt as if I was in heaven, the other ten as if being engaged was somehow altogether a failure. Then we broke it off. I for a week felt fit for nothing but drowning myself. I have had many since, some much more terrible smites, but that is the most interesting to look back to. Everything was so fresh. I wonder how long yours will last. I would not have George Austen for twenty thousand a year. That he has been engaged twice already everybody knows, many more times, some people say. I only hope you will be tired of him before he is tired of you."

"Ethel, don't talk so," pleaded her poor sister, whose patience could hold out no longer, "you have no heart. Promise me not to tell mamma. I could not bear to have it known all at once. I want to enjoy my secret to myself for a little while. And we have agreed for the present to keep it a secret."

"You know, Alice, I never tell. What do you think of Miss Valettas?"

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"Oh! she is so nice. I am sure she is a lady as much as any of ourselves. And, do you know, when I told her how pleased I was to see her, and kissed her, she looked, poor thing, as if nobody was ever kind to her. I feel so sorry for her. We must do all we can to make her happy whilst she is here."

"Isn't she pretty, too! No wonder Fred fell in love with her. And such a figure! And her feet! did you notice her feet?"

"No, I cannot say I did."

"You look, then. I like her awfully."

They continued discussing and bepraising their new friend. Alice, impressed with a sense of her misfortunes and moral qualities, was sure she was very sensitive, and very good. Ethel, who had a keener eye for personal attractions, opined that Miss Valettas must have hosts of admirers, and, as she was not married, was probably an "awful flirt." This, both agreed, looked bad for poor Fred. But then Fred had saved her life, and that, as everyone knew, constituted an indisputable claim to a lady's heart and hand. Whilst they still discussed the probability of her becoming their sister-in-law, and how their mother would like it, the

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subject of their conversation appeared on the lawn. On her approach, they made room for her between them on the garden-seat, but she pointed to the ground at their feet, and said,

“If I might, I would rather sit there.”

“Do whatever you like,” said Alice, “you are not among strangers.”

Miss Valettas sat down on the grass, and leant back against the seat on which the girls were sitting.

“We have been wondering what we are to call you,” said Ethel, “you know this is Alice, and I am Ethel, and you are——”

“Bourbachokátzouli.”

“But we cannot call you Bourbachokátzouli, it is too long.”

“Then call me Bee, unless you can make my name still shorter.”

The girls laughed.

“That will do very well,” said Ethel, “and people will think you are called Beatrix, which is a very pretty name.”

“I like my own long name a great deal better, though. I daresay you will think it strange, but I am very proud of it.”

“Now, Bee,” said Ethel, “I must tell you

several things. Our sister Lilian is a very disagreeable person. Most likely you have noticed that. Call her Miss Lilian Sarleigh, or else you will offend her. When she is rude you must not mind it. She is rude to everybody. As long as you take no notice of her, and don't interfere with her nasty ways——"

"Ethel!" expostulated Alice.

"Yes, her nasty, *nasty* ways——she will not interfere much with you, beyond saying spiteful things."

"Miss Lilian Sarleigh is not pleasant to live with?"

"Not at all. She is horrible."

The amusements in prospect were next explained to Miss Valettas. A garden-party was to take place on Tuesday, to which she was invited with them; a dance on Wednesday, to which they could get her an invitation if she liked to go. Thursday they would have to themselves. A big pic-nic was fixed for Friday. On Saturday they would be too tired to do anything. Sunday they went to church, of course; but generally had visitors in the afternoon. There was to be a concert on Monday evening, and luncheon at the Austens, to which she was

invited on Tuesday. Then there were always available the garden, the woods, and the river, and it was not far by rail to the sea.

Bee lost no time in assuring them this was exactly the sort of life that suited her constitution. Then she must tell them what she liked, for instance, music, painting, novels, cards, singing, drawing, chess, dancing, sketching, poetry, pictures, theatricals, billiards, photographs, serious books, history, theatres, operas, fancy work, birds, flowers, lawn-tennis, cats, dogs, horses, ponies, yachting, walking, driving, riding, hunting, skating, rinking, boating.

"Dear me!" she said at last, "I don't think anybody ever took so much trouble to find out what I liked. You will spoil me altogether, you good, kind darlings."

Seeing she was now entirely at home with them, Alice ventured on more delicate questions. "Had Bee seen her brother lately?" "This morning." "Was he well?" "Very." There was a remarkable change in Bee's tone.

"Do you like his church?"

"I am a Roman Catholic, you know."

Ethel and Alice exchanged a glance behind her.



"Fred never told us that," said Ethel.

Alice felt a morsel estranged from her friend, and said nothing. An awkward little silence ensued. Then Miss Valettas glanced up at the sisters. To Alice she said,

"I see you are shocked."

"I am not," said Ethel, quickly. "Only I am afraid there is no Roman Catholic church here."

"Oh, I am a bad Catholic. I shan't break my heart if I can't go to Mass."

"You will perhaps come to our church," said Alice.

"No, thank you."

"You had rather say your prayers at home?"

"Yes, out of a novel." She looked round at Alice, who had spoken seriously and softly, and laughed. "I am a shockingly wicked girl, positively awful," she continued, picking a blade of grass, and breaking it into little pieces as she spoke.

Alice was shocked, and began to think she should like Miss Valettas less than she at first expected. Having taken so unfortunate a turn, their conversation might easily now have led up to something extremely unpleasant, had

not Ethel dexterously intervened, and directed it into another channel. Soon after, a servant appeared, and announced that Mr. Nylan was in the dining-room. Alice rose to go to him, and, having received an injunction from Ethel to bring him out to her and Miss Valettas, left the two girls on the lawn.

"I am sorry, Bee, for what Alice said just now. I mean about your religion," said Ethel.

"And I am sorry I shocked her. But I can't help it, when people look so dreadfully serious."

"You are not a bit like Alice, Bee, and I don't believe you will ever be real friends."

"Very likely not. Ethel,"—she turned half round, and, leaning her bosom against Ethel's knees, looked her hard in the face—"you are like me, are you not? Fond of fun, and nonsense, and dress, and not very serious."

"Well, Bee?"

"I want to ask you something, if you won't mind. Do you say your prayers?"

"Yes, Bee, of course."

"I think I shall say mine. I wish to do so sometimes. But then, I'm not like you."

She hung her head, and resumed her former

position. The little heartless thing to whom she was talking could not understand her. Yet all the kindest, gentlest words that good souls had said to her had had less influence over her strange mind than the discovery that another thoughtless girl was not quite so irreligious as herself. Ethel watched her breaking up little bits of grass, and thought what a strange girl this was her brother had found on the verge of starvation. Suddenly Miss Valettas looked up and said,

“Who is Mr. Nylan?”

“A cousin of ours who lives not very far off. He is a great favourite with mamma, and we all like him. You would be amused at him, he is so droll.”

“Is he nice?”

“Awfully. He and I were engaged once for ten days. We broke it off by mutual consent. Of course I returned his presents. Would you believe it, the next morning he called and brought back the engaged ring. He said, if I would keep it, he would ask to be allowed to keep a locket with my hair which I had given him, just for tokens of our having once been fond of each other. It was a beautiful diamond

ring, worth much more than the locket, and I was glad to have it. I always wear it, not on my engaged finger, of course. See !”

“’Tis a pretty ring. He must be a nice man. Why did you quarrel ?”

“We did not quarrel, we got tired of it. He was sick of being congratulated, and so was I. As he said it was quite worth breaking off the engagement, to see how strange people looked, when we replied to their congratulations with ‘You have not heard then that the engagement is broken off.’ He is a strange man, one of those men who will not do anything. His father wanted him to go into the Army, or to go to Oxford, or to be a barrister, or to do something. He went to Oxford for a term or two. Then he left. He does not care for hunting, or shooting, or anything. He won’t settle anywhere, won’t even get married. Yet to hear him talk you would think him the busiest man in the world. Strangest of all, he invariably wants some one to help him to be idle.”

“Is he pleasant ?”

“Very. He does not say much when alone with anyone, but when there are many people

together, he says awfully stupid, obvious things, and, though there is nothing in them, it is impossible to avoid laughing at the way he drops his observations, exactly as if he meant to let them fall on your toes. He has a trick too of saying, 'I never tell, you know,' 'I never talk about things,' that makes people think he knows things he does not know, and believe him wonderfully reticent."

"Did you like him much?"

"A good deal at first. You understand."

"I understand. Do you care for him still?"

"I don't know."

"I do, though," said Bourbachokátzouli, looking at her. "You don't care a straw for him."

"Here he comes," said Ethel.

He was a dark man, over six feet high, with short, black, slightly curly hair, and a heavy, coarse moustache. His cheek bones were high, his nose long. His cheeks had a half pained, half hungry look, and the sharp corners of his thin face gave it an almost polygonal appearance. He was pale, but his dark eyes sparkled slyly in their deep cavities, which seemed to have been sunk by long continu-

ed melancholy. If not a genius, Nylan had all the looks of one. His walk was the dignified tread of a soldier, his easy air that of an aristocrat. Ethel introduced him to Miss Valettas. He stood a few minutes talking to the girls. He spoke of Mrs. Sarleigh's seeming better, laughing at her notion that her doctor's drugs had recently deteriorated, and asked Miss Valettas, a little nervously, how long she was likely to stay at Nanham. Then he left.

"I am disappointed in Mr. Nylan," said Bee, as soon as he was gone.

"Most people are," replied Ethel.

## CHAPTER XII.

THE first fortnight of Miss Valettas' stay at Nanham was one unclouded treat. Never had she enjoyed herself so much. Determined their guest should have all the pleasure and amusement it lay in their power to give, Alice and Ethel Sarleigh spared themselves neither thought nor trouble in entertaining her. They held many a private consultation how deftly to apportion time and amusements so that Bee should neither be tired nor dull, and cunningly devised unexpected pleasures that she should not be fatigued with engagements. Feeling that she was distinctly their guest, they laid aside for a time their own pursuits, and devoted themselves entirely to her, holding themselves ready to go out, or stay at home, to walk, drive, play, or read, as she might wish.

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In the slyest way they arrived at what were her favourite flowers and fruits, the wines she liked, the delicacies most to her taste, even her weakness for a particular Russian cigarette and certain French sweetmeats. The gratification, to the utmost of their ability, of every fancy discovered, followed as a matter of course. Ethel got Nylan to bring a supply of the cigarettes from town, and Alice brought Bee, every morning, her tea and cream whilst she was dressing. Anyone would have been hard to please whom such attentions failed to gratify. Miss Valettas, whom it was easy to please, was delighted, and enjoyed herself like a child. Had she been less experienced, she might have regarded Mrs. Sarleigh's house as an earthly paradise, where things happened of themselves more felicitously than they could be planned. But she had seen enough to know a good deal of care and management on somebody's part is needed to make a guest's pleasures go smoothly. Perhaps she enjoyed herself the more for the consciousness that she was the object of so much kindness and attention.

Yet, Grove House was in itself an undeniably pleasant place. The house was well propor-



tioned, well built, and conveniently arranged. The rooms were large and high, and well lighted. Great taste had been shown in furnishing, and, as the house had been for years a lady's house, there were about it the elegance and softness with which women, whenever they can, surround themselves. The bed-rooms were as dainty and smart as the sitting-rooms, the verandah and balcony as scrupulously orderly as the boudoir. The chairs were soft, the rugs warm, the tables tidy. Everything white was white as snow, everything bright as bright as a new sovereign. No limboes existed for sticks and hats and fishing-boots. There was no gear that women might not touch nor set to rights.

Not one item of all this was overlooked by Bourbachokátzouli's intensely feminine mind. To live in a house that is as a house should be is one of womanhood's eternal dreams, and she who had oft and very vividly dreamed it, generally mixed with her frank thanks to her girlish friends for "spoiling her so shamefully," congratulations on their happy lot.

"You lucky, lucky girls," she would say, "who live in such an elysium. If you only

knew how much better you are off than you imagine."

Years had elapsed since Miss Valettas had lived in the country. Long ago, in her wild home in Crete, she had seen the sun rise over the hills, breathed the fresh breezes, and listened to the quiet melodies of a country life far other than that of England. But she was then a little thing, too young to notice that the morning air was fresh, or the sunshine gay, or the evening calm and still. Since, she had lived in cities, and seen the country only from the windows of hurrying trains. If she had breathed its air for a day or two, that had been at some wretched country hotel, where the annoyances indoors more than outweighed any enjoyment to be gained from the fresh air without. In consequence, the pleasant English home, just outside a country town, was, to her, not only a new phase of existence, but an experience of terrestrial felicity of which she had no idea.

When Ethel said, "I don't believe Bee ever tasted bread, or butter, or milk, or cream, or water before," she was not far from right. Bee did her best now to make up for past lack of opportunity, and enjoyed the good things about

her with a zest and an appetite sharpened by fresh air, for which she felt at times constrained to apologize, though the hearty country girls laughed at her for being a sparing eater.

To her credit, too, be it recorded that she proved a charming guest. From the hour of her arrival the house seemed possessed with a spirit of sunshine and merriment. Nobody could resist the spell of her clear, soft voice, her sunny face, her bright eyes, and gracious speech. The fat old cook, who had been for ten years celebrated for the moroseness of her temper, told Mrs. Sarleigh it did her good to hear Miss Valettas laugh. Even Lilian succumbed at the end of the third day, incapable of being unmeaningly rude to one who never addressed her but with distant courtesy, and whose "Good morning, Miss Lilian Sarleigh," "Good night, Miss Lilian Sarleigh," was as cold and formal as the manner in which she took, without the faintest pressure, Lilian's hand whilst she spoke.

Herself bright and agreeable with all, nothing came amiss to Bourbachokátzouli. If it was fine she enjoyed going out, if wet she was equally content to stay indoors, and play, sing, or read. She seemed only anxious to give as

little trouble and as much pleasure to others as possible. The girls were enchanted, and not a little proud of their undeniably handsome friend, whom nobody could help admiring.

But they also discovered that they had a good deal more to learn from her than they supposed. She was not only more accomplished, but also better educated than they were, to a degree they had little suspected. She knew things that had never entered their unsophisticated minds, cunning little scraps of worldly wisdom (she had bought some of them dearly enough) that made them open their eyes, feminine tricks and manoeuvres, compared with which all Ethel's flirting and finessing were nursery games, and secrets of the toilet potent as the *kestos* of Aphroditê. Impressed by these last, and the fabulous pains her new friend bestowed on dressing herself, Ethel remarked to her sister,

"I thought I knew something about how to dress, but, since Bee has been here, I have learned I am a slattern like Lily, only not quite so bad."

Alice continued to claim the prerogative of being Miss Valettas' especial friend, but a very

few hours sufficed to prove that not Bee and Alice, but Bee and Ethel, were the really congenial spirits. Miss Valettas saw things much more from Ethel's point of view than Alice's, and, though she thoroughly realized the former's selfishness and vanity, distinctly preferred it to Alice's dull goodness, a feminine imitation of her brother's very narrow clerical mind. Alice, too, in secret, was far from feeling at her ease with Miss Valettas. As she confessed to her sister, "she wished she could be a little more sure about Bee." Bee would say such strange things, things that made Alice half sorry, and more than half suspicious. With considerable appearance of reason, Ethel suggested in return that Bee did not mean half she said, and that often her outlandish remarks were prompted by a mischievous love of capping everything serious with something ridiculous. The explanation failed to satisfy Alice, and did not truly express Ethel's own thoughts on the subject.

For there certainly was something about Miss Valettas inexplicable. The more familiar the girls became with her, the more fully they were made aware of it. Not only was she ever at

cross-purposes with herself, her representations about her own past were subject to a like unsatisfactory inconsistency. From the time her grandmother gave her a box of Turkish sweetmeats for saying her creed without a mistake, till the time she was at the convent in Paris, all was clear enough. Her childhood in Crete, the death of her mother (a celebrated Athenian beauty who married a Cretan gentleman, charmed by his witty talk), her first visit to Athens, and her father's bringing her to Paris, she could detail consistently enough. She remained at Paris till she was a great girl. Then, for a few weeks, she returned to Crete, till the trumpety rebellion broke out, in which her father afterwards lost his life. He, at this time, prudently sent her back to her convent in Paris. He had invested a considerable sum in the French funds for her support in the event of his death, the news of which, to her indescribable grief, reached her soon after her return to France. Then came a blank. Then she was a governess, travelling on the Continent with Mr. Noall and his wife and girls. Why she left them was unexplained. They apparently treated her kindly, and, if they were in some respects odd people,

she had not herself wished on that account to part from them. Yet, when they went abroad again, after their stay in London, they left her behind to shift for herself. In consequence, she was nearly starved, and, only when on the point of destroying herself, was somewhat reluctantly assisted by Sarleigh.

What occurred in the blank between the convent and her being governess to Mr. Noall's girls could never be discovered. Ethel and Alice questioned her on the subject point-blank. "What did you do, Bee, in the time between your father's death and your first engagement as a governess?" She answered, "Oh, not much," or "I scarcely remember what happened after I lost my father, except that I was mad with grief," or evaded replying by speaking of other things. "What had become of the money her father invested for her in the French funds?" "Money goes," quoth Bee, "everybody knows that." "But you said you never had it." "Neither did I." "What became of it, then?" She did not know, she wished she had it to spend, it would just allow her for gloves, bonnets, and cigarettes what a girl ought to spend on such things. If Sarleigh had asked such

questions as his sisters did, she would, in some formal or figurative way, have told him to hold his tongue. With Montenotte a look would have answered the same purpose. But the girls were not so easily silenced, and returned to their questions with provoking assiduity, insisting that, as she was nearly twenty-two, some time must have elapsed since she left the convent, and that this time was very imperfectly accounted for. They did not mince matters, and the evasive replies with which she put them off, far from answering her purpose, only stimulated their curiosity. Where had she learned to know so much of the world? Where had she been taught those wonderful mysteries of the toilet-table, for she acknowledged it was not in the convent? At what period of her life had she been such a dreadful flirt? But when Ethel asked, at the conclusion of a piquant tale, "And when did that happen, Bee, and where?" when Alice said, "Who was Monsieur So-and-so, and how came you to know him?" then banter that explained nothing was all that was to be had for an answer. Every day something inexplicable came to the surface. Ethel laughed and shrugged her shoulders. Bee, she



said, was humbugging them. She was no more a Greek than a Jew, but some French girl with any amount of money, who was in love with Fred, Heaven only knew why, and had deliberately set a trap to catch him. "She is up to anything, you know. And as for her poverty, look how she dresses!"

Alice hoped all was right, gradually learnt to ask fewer questions, and felt thankful that Lilian left Miss Valettas to herself and Ethel. At times Bourbachokátzouli could have bitten her tongue for the unguarded things it had said, and the awkward admissions it made, leading up to questions it was impossible to answer.

A great deal too careless to trouble herself about her inability to explain the past, whilst she had an opportunity of enjoying the present, she left the girls to puzzle out as best they could the anomalies of her history and character, but another person's misgivings she took an early opportunity of dispelling. Though Mrs. Sarleigh's manner was polite, and even kind, her astute guest soon perceived her presence at Nanham was distasteful to the old lady. The reason was easily guessed. Mrs. Sarleigh

did not wish her for a daughter-in-law. As she and her hostess were on this subject entirely agreed, Bee saw no reason why a groundless apprehension should render two people uncomfortable.

It was the Sunday after her arrival at Nanham. The girls had gone to evening service. Mrs. Sarleigh remained at home. Sitting at her bed-room window reading sometimes, and sometimes surveying with pleasure the hushed landscape mellowing in the fading light, Miss Valettas saw Mrs. Sarleigh loitering on the lawn. This opportunity of a private talk she determined on the spot to utilize to dispel the alarms that unsettled the old lady's ease. Whilst leaning over a bed of deep crimson carnations, Mrs. Sarleigh became aware that her guest was approaching from the further end of the lawn. As she nervously avoided her by a number of little moves, Bourbach-okátzouli, who in turn pretended not to be purposely seeking her, thought she had discovered whence the deacon inherited his timidity. Ultimately, the ladies found themselves face to face, and exchanged pretences of surprise. After a short conversation about the

flowers, Miss Valettas, never affected with shyness, said, pointedly,

"I want to speak to you very frankly, Mrs. Sarleigh. May I?"

"Yes, my dear," said Mrs. Sarleigh, mentally adding, "I hope it is nothing about Fred."

"I think, from something Miss Sarleigh said yesterday, there is an impression afloat that I am engaged to Mr. Sarleigh. You will not think me rude, when I only desire to be straightforward. I am not engaged to Mr. Sarleigh, and never shall be. He has been my best friend in a great need, and I am very grateful to him, but that is another thing."

For a minute or more Mrs. Sarleigh looked her hard in the face. Then she laid her hand on Bourbachokátzouli's arm and said,

"My dear, I am much obliged to you for speaking plainly."

Miss Valettas thought at the moment she had relieved her hostess's mind, and that her frankness had made a favourable impression. But in all this, as she soon perceived, she was mistaken. Mrs. Sarleigh was not so absolutely convinced as before that her son meant to make this strange young woman his wife, and that

was all. She did not believe Miss Valettas, and still found her presence distasteful. The impression Bourbachokátzouli's blunt candour made was an unpleasant one. Clear, poignant speech in mastered tones, was not like the speech girls known to Mrs. Sarleigh used. It took the old lady by surprise, and embarrassed her. It put the speaker at once outside her sympathy, for it showed she was not, what Mrs. Sarleigh held it every girl's first duty to be, like other girls. Before they met, Mrs. Sarleigh only felt sure she should not like Miss Valettas. Now they had met, she felt sure she disliked her exceedingly, and should continue to do so more and more, the more she became acquainted with this foreign girl's un-English ways.

Though she said nothing to her daughters of the ill-devised manner of Miss Valettas' communication (they were so infatuated about their new friend that to do so would be but waste of breath), she told them what had been said. She further signified to them she hoped it was true, and at the same time scarcely believed it. Ethel's reply, that "Bee would be a fool to throw herself away on Fred, but she should

have liked her for a sister-in-law," might have been anticipated. Alice, less solicitous of relationship to Bourbachokátzouli, but, as usual, unselfish and sympathizing with what she believed her brother's dearest hopes, was distinctly distressed. Her friend's conduct appeared to her tantamount to combined heartless ingratitude and thoughtless disregard of her own future happiness. With artless affectionateness, she pleaded her brother's cause with her friend, put his many good points and his real love in the strongest light, and begged that he might not be so misjudged as to be coldly denied even hope.

Miss Valettas' demeanour and rejoinders on the occasion were alike brusque and paradoxical.

"It cannot be, it cannot be," she repeated, petulantly, at the same time requesting Alice to desist from further pressing her. In her heartfelt earnestness, Alice, at the end, hinted that her love was the object not only of the deacon's hopes, but of his prayers.

"Really, Alice," replied Bourbachokátzouli, "you make me quite nervous. I know your brother is very good, and that good people get

the things they pray for, but I do think it hard to be prayed into loving a man against my will. He really ought to know better than to take such an unfair advantage of me."

Alice was hurt and shocked too, perhaps justifiably, for she had spoken out of the fullness of a full heart. Bee was very different from all she had imagined her, very like indeed to a type of character she could neither love nor admire.

The sinister surmises to which Bee's manner gave birth in the brain of Mrs. Sarleigh and her eldest daughter were strictly confined to their individual thoughts. Without suspecting anything of the kind on the part of the young lady's friends, the little world of Nanham society likewise had its misgivings about her. To that world Mrs. Sarleigh's introduction had given her immediate admittance. Always at her best among strangers, she was universally acknowledged as a lady-like, accomplished girl, a decided acquisition at picnics and parties, where she invariably made herself intensely agreeable. She sang and played undeniably well, dressed prettily, flirted tastefully, talked wittily (that was not liked by the ladies), and danced

divinely. As the men admired, the women suspected, and the girls envied her, everyone treated her with politeness. But amongst simpletons wit is a monstrosity, and she found no sympathy and made no friends. No one can charm the great deaf-mute English-country-town society. As Miss Valettas was staying with Mrs. Sarleigh, she was, of course, "all right," and she was agreeable and obliging, but nobody knew whence she came. As the men liked her, she was possibly "all wrong." The best that could be said of her was what the vicar's wife had said, "A pleasant young person, fairly good-looking, foreign, you know, rather accomplished, inclined to be fast, and a beggar." Still the great deaf-mute grinned a nice grin at Miss Valettas, and graciously permitted her to join in his antics and share his food. Empty as it was, Ethel, whose vanity was insatiable, would have certainly become hideously jealous of this notice bestowed on her friend, had not the diplomatic skill of the latter provided against such unpleasantness.

In public Miss Valettas seldom lost an opportunity of saying pretty things about the Miss Sarleighs, never when she saw a reasonable

prospect of her observations being afterwards repeated to the girls. And some flattering tale of what had been said to her, or of what she had casually overheard concerning Ethel's beauty, taste, and wit, was always ready, to make sweet music in Ethel's ears on Bourbachokátzouli's return home. Some things she related were true, many more were not. Ethel welcomed fact and fiction alike, and would even listen to the same flattering anecdote repeated many times. She was far the prettiest girl in Nanhams, and a girl in many ways above the ordinary level, and the greed with which she swallowed the most nauseous adulation disgusted Bourbachokátzouli. It made her feel the sort of compassion for Ethel she saw others bestowing on herself. An ugly defect in her own character was indisputably displayed by this expedient of defending herself against Ethel's vanity, by glutting it with mischievous adulation. It was the meanest meanness of one woman's practised artfulness taking advantage of another's inexperienced weakness, and proved that Miss Valettas scarcely knew herself when she opined "she would not do anything dishonourable." That she had no suspicion of the



baseness of the treachery of which she was guilty made it the blacker. It may serve for a sombre warning of the degrading risk a woman incurs in defending herself, even in her utmost peril, with the dastardly weapons of cunning and falsehood.

## CHAPTER XIII.

AT the end of that first fortnight at Nanham, which had been so bright and happy, heavy clouds began to gather over Bourbachokátzouli's head. She had come to enjoy herself. She could not, under these circumstances, be expected voluntarily to forego a pastime that can lend excitement to the dullest, and a more fervid fascination to the gayest existence: flirtation. Unfortunately for her, her flirting, instead of being a diversion, led to the most undesirable complications. Amongst the younger men, several paid her more or less marked attention. No woman sees herself admired with indifference, and Bee was of opinion that a neat compliment merited at least a gracious acceptance. On the other hand, she was entirely innocent of any purpose or idea of being indiscreet. Serious

love-making she neither intended to be guilty of nor to permit, and any advance beyond pretty speeches and trifling attentions was at once met by chilling rebuffs. The course things took was not of her choosing, rather the very contradictory. But a pretty woman cannot help the men falling in love with her.

Anyone who had met Alice's flame, George Austen, at a shooting-party, or a meet, or who had spent a day with him on the moors, or fishing, would have pronounced him a man most unlikely to make a fool of himself with a woman. He passed among men for a bluff, good-natured fellow, who would some day say to a girl, "Miss So-and-so, will you marry me?" and, if she replied "Yes," would be as faithful as a hound, and, if she said "No," would shrug his shoulders, and soon ask some one else.

But the girls had different views, and averred he was always in love with the last pretty face he had seen. The rising feminine community has a lore of its own as carefully concealed from "the men," as their brothers' college tales and club-room jokes are kept from ears that wear earrings. A girl might be ready to have the small-pox for a man, yet she would not

betray to him the feminine mysteries. Many young ladies in Nanham could have told how, last winter, the lasses at the glee club, on comparing experiences, found that George Austen had proposed to almost every one of them, and been accepted by four. On that occasion they called him some very strange names, and told, in turn, ill-natured stories regarding his weaker moments. Had the poor little things, who displayed, it must be confessed, very uncivilized tempers, been more philosophical, they would have seen that Austen was but one of nature's hunters, a creature whose one idea is to catch. Humanity reproduces the types of all the grades through which it is said to have grown up. This by no means rare character, reverting to the habit of some voracious link in the genesis of man, has no conception beyond that of the chase. The game secured, a woman, a fortune, a fox, or a butterfly, the constitutional hunter turns to hunt for something else. Hence Austen's fame in the field, and apparently incongruous weakness for good-looking faces.

Perhaps, thus, though Alice stoutly denied it, there was truth in Ethel's significant remark that her hint to the sportsman of another man

seeking the game was what brought him at once to the point. Be that as it may, the game once secured, though it was the truest love that ever English maiden had to give, as he walked listlessly homewards after leaving Alice Sarleigh at her mother's gate, Austen comprehended that he cared less about being engaged to her than he had supposed he should, and his first subsequent encounter with Miss Valettas seriously shook his scarcely half-hearted allegiance.

They met at the garden-party, which took place the day after Miss Valettas' arrival. Alice introduced them. In virtue of her newly-acquired right to command, she charged Austen to take particular care of her friend, and to show her how to play lawn-tennis. A more foolish thing Alice never did. During a few preliminary instructions Austen made a mental comparison between his fiancée and her friend, very much to the advantage of the latter. A sentimental interest in his handsome pupil immediately ensued. A man of little taste easily falls in love. For him her one attraction was her beauty. Extremely striking that was beyond doubt, but his perception of it was a dim

one, as of something indefinite that fascinated. Delicacy of perception sufficient to discern precisely what commanded his admiration he had not. Had he been pressed to give a closer description of her than was contained in the single word "handsome," he would have said she was "awfully handsome." "D——d handsome" in the mouth of his groom would have expressed asmuch. Neither master nor man could have got further in describing Miss Valettas, though both might have acquitted themselves creditably in delineating the good points of a horse. That one so blind to what was visible should be absolutely insensible to more subtle traits followed as a matter of course. Miss Valettas' ideas or idiosyncracies were things of whose very existence Austen enjoyed invincible ignorance. He would take for granted that she was more easily tired than himself, that she had a weakness for scents, laces, and sweetmeats, and that when hurt, (poor little thing!) she cried. In short, she was not a man. This many men suppose is all that is to be known about a woman.

It is perhaps beyond a novelist's power to engage a reader's attention in a passion in-

spired by personal beauty alone. Not merely because so mean a passion seldom presents features worthy of attention, but because words are insufficient to maintain before the mind the grace that is the mainspring of the whole. Such stories belong to the stage. Yet, as everyone must have felt the irresistible fascination of personal beauty, the infatuation Bourbachokátzouli awakened in George Austen will be best understood by those who would have least patience to read of its development.

She was not the woman to be favourably impressed by such an admirer. For the lesson in lawn-tennis she thanked him graciously. She secretly regretted that a kinder fortune had not given her some other partner in the game that followed, in which she played abominably. The release from his company that ensued at the end of the game was very welcome. As soon as he divined he was not likely that afternoon to see more of her, Austen slunk away from the party. That Miss Sarleigh would be looking forward to meeting him and talking with him, and that he was probably both spoiling her pleasure and giving her actual pain, he knew. But ready excuses for his conduct pre-

sented themselves. It is foolishness for a man to talk to a girl when he is not in the humour. As he and Miss Sarleigh were now engaged they would have ample opportunity for conversation in the future. For the present he could not get Miss Valettas out of his thoughts. On his homeward way he met some men going to the river. He joined them. In their society his lady friends were for a time forgotten.

Poor Alice, who had looked forward to a tête-à-tête, and made sure of at least a good deal of her lover's society, was surprised at his never coming near her. She almost regretted the generosity with which she had resigned him to her friend. Of her own imprudence she was too innocent to have a suspicion. That her lover and her friend had not been enchanted with one another, even hurt her. She mentioned to Ethel with annoyance that Bee had called Mr. Austen stupid. "Bee is very good-looking, and it is as well they should not like each other," was Ethel's laconic reply.

In a few days the real state of the case became apparent to Ethel. The girls had gone together to one of the neighbouring woods, and, whilst picking wild flowers, Ethel stumbled



over some large loose stones, and sprained her ankle. Alice immediately proposed that Bee should remain with her sister, whilst she returned home and brought the pony-carriage. Ere she had gone many yards she met Austen driving a little two-wheeled basket-carriage. Their difficulty was immediately made known to him. Alice proposed that he should either drive Ethel home, or if he could trust the pony and Ethel to Miss Valettas (who could drive very well) he and herself might walk back to Nanham together. There was not room in the little carriage for more than two.

Austen had other views. He was quite willing to lend his nondescript little vehicle, but it seemed to him that Alice should drive Ethel home. Miss Valettas and he would walk. Bourbachokátzouli, thinking Alice would rather be with her sister, and had only proposed her driving out of courtesy, seconded this. Despite Ethel's attempts to effect some other arrangement, ultimately she and Alice drove off, leaving together Austen and their friend. Alice was less hurt than provoked with herself for suspecting Austen of slighting her. It was, she assured herself, a very bad beginning of a

lifetime's confidence to doubt, in such a trifling matter, that her lover had been actuated by the kindest motives. Ethel slipped her arm round her sister's waist, and said, as she looked into her wistful face, "Dear old Alice, he is not half good enough for you." She at least foresaw what was to happen, and briskly surmised what line Bee would take. Alice made no reply. Immersed in their several meditations, the sisters reached home without exchanging a remark.

Miss Valettas and Austen followed the same road on foot. Common courtesy compelled the former to make herself agreeable to the man who had helped her friends in a difficulty. She assumed an easy tone of slight familiarity and reconnaissance that added in a winning way to the natural charms of her beauty. Austen was bewitched, and regretted every step that shortened the remaining distance. Plenty of conversation of a particular kind was at his command, and he did his best to amuse his companion with histories of horses, and dogs, and sporting adventures, interspersed with bucolic tales intended to be humorous. She listened with a well-feigned interest. On his

dogs, two beautiful terriers, she bestowed some real admiration. She praised Nanham, saying it was the loveliest place she had ever seen, and expressing a wish that it was her home. At the same time she was becoming uncomfortably conscious of the frequent glances Austen stole at her face, her hands, and even her feet. Whilst he was pressing her to let him teach her to steer, and had so far succeeded as to extract a promise that, if the Miss Sarleighs would come too, she would come on the water, the pony-carriage appeared, driven by Mrs. Sarleigh's boy, whom Alice had sent back with it. For this attention on his fiancée's part Mr. Austen felt anything rather than thankful. Saying she was now near home, Miss Valetas declined alike to be driven to Mrs. Sarleigh's by Mr. Austen, or by the lad, and, thanking him prettily in her own name, and that of her friends, for his timely assistance, begged he would at once proceed on the business his kindness to them had interrupted.

On her return home she said nothing to the girls about her walk with Austen. It seemed ill-natured to let them suspect she had found it

tedious. Ethel interpreted her silence otherwise. Her suspicions were so strong that she said to Alice, "Tell Bee you are engaged to George Austen," though she carefully avoided disclosing the reason of her advice. But Alice was obstinate about the temporary secrecy, which, she said, she both herself wished and had promised her lover.

From this date Austen's new passion ran the vulgar course of a foolish attachment, and grew as much stronger as its senselessness became the more apparent. The oft-repeated details of such a wooing may be all left untold. The drift of his attentions having been discovered by Miss Valettas at the end of forty-eight hours, his advances were repelled first with quiet rebuffs, and, when these proved insufficient, with a studied frigidity that made his perseverance very discourteous. Had he not evidently been a familiar friend of her host's, she would without hesitation have cut him. The only result of her discountenancing his addresses was a stronger determination on his part to win her. The huntsman's instinct was thoroughly aroused by the coyness and cunning of the game.

His behaviour to Alice Sarleigh at first, and when they were alone, showed a considerateness, under the circumstances, more cruel than neglect. Towards the end of the fortnight his manner slightly changed. He commenced avoiding her, and speaking coldly to her. No calculation suggested this. It was the mechanical result of pre-occupation. The girl, secretly expecting her engaged ring, and beginning to wonder why no mention of it was made, bore with him for a few days with heroic patience and devotion. She thought he might be vexed, anxious, unwell, out of temper: men have so many things to bother them. Determined to show him she was superior to vulgar disquietudes, she scrupulously shunned everything that could lead him to suppose she felt, or suspected, his manner towards her.

The events of these intervening days, during which, as has been already related, the three girls were all too much occupied with plans and pleasures to devote much thought to either annoyances or anxieties, may be passed over. The occasion of Bourbachokátzouli's receiving the promised lesson in steering was a climax. Numerous engagements had caused this to be

postponed from day to day. She would herself have coined some excuse to escape it altogether, but Alice, eager for an hour or two with Austen, was intent on going, and Miss Valettas yielded.

At luncheon-time Willie Nylan came in, and enlivened their meal. He and Bee were quarrelsome friends, and a war of words invariably ensued when they met. He had the courtesy always to leave her victorious in argument, and generally spoilt the victory by saying, when his position was shown untenable, "I never contradict a lady." As he was leaving the house Lilian called him back, and said,

"Mr. Nylan, I wish you would tell that fool Mr. Austen either to behave to my sister Alice like a man, or else to keep away altogether."

"What an elegant message! May I inquire its meaning?"

"Oh, you know, or I daresay you don't know that he has been making love to Alice for a long time, and she, like a simpleton that she is, has been making love to him. They are engaged now. Since Miss Valettas has been here he runs after her. I don't suppose either

he or she supposes anyone notices them. I observed it at once. Alice is just beginning to see it. Alice is such a simpleton that she thinks it impossible for a man who has told her he loves her to change his mind. But I don't care to see my sister made a fool of."

"I'll speak, cousin."

In the town he met Austen, and said, knowing the excuse that must be alleged for declining, "Come home with me to dinner, Austen."

"Can't. I am going on the water with Miss Valettas and the Sarleigh girls."

"Ah! Apropos of the Valettas. You'll excuse me, my dear fellow, you are going to make a fool of yourself. Don't."

"I know what you mean, Nylan. But it's too late. The thing's done. You don't know what this girl is."

"Yes, I do. She is better looking than my cousin. But my cousin is a good little girl, Austen, and you are behaving badly to her."

"Nylan, I can't help liking the other."

"You'll have to some day. Bee Valettas will never marry a poor man. You are poor. Ergo."

"I think I ought to know best about that."

"I agree. You ought, unfortunately you don't. Stop it, man, in time, or else—go on with it, and one of those days you'll see in what a jolly little mess you'll find yourself. Only behave straightforwardly to my cousin."

Though a good deal provoked, Austen concealed his anger. The muscles of his cheeks only grew rigid as he pressed his teeth together.

"I will," he answered, after a pause, "but by saying I shall some day find myself in a mess, do you mean that you know something about Bee Valettas?"

"I never talk about what I know of people, especially ladies."

This was one of Nylan's favourite phrases. By its frequent repetition on occasions when he knew something, and when he knew nothing alike, he had acquired the reputation of knowing much and being marvellously reticent. Austen inferred from it now that Nylan was acquainted with some secret an inkling of which might be useful to himself. As Miss Valettas was staying with relations, with whom Nylan was on the most intimate terms,



this was not improbable. He knew, however, that it was vain to attempt to get from Nylan any information he did not wish to give, and so asked no further questions. The men parted dissatisfied with one another.

At the last moment, whilst the girls were dressing, Ethel determined not to go on the river. There would be a pair-oar, she said, and two men and three girls always made a dull company. But when Alice and Bee arrived at the boat-house, they found that instead of having brought a pair-oar and a friend, Austen was alone, and intended to scull. He apologised to Miss Valettas for this, saying that they should not perhaps be able to go quite so fast or so far, but that she could learn to steer all the same. "I don't care if only we get home in time for dinner," was her indifferent reply. As soon as the girls were comfortably seated in the boat, he gave her the yoke lines, and explained to her with some care how she should use them. When he had finished, Bee handed them to Alice, who was sitting by her, saying,

"Here, Alice, pull the side you want to go, only not too hard, or, if you will take my advice,

have nothing to do with these cords, you will only spoil your gloves."

"Shall I steer?" said Alice, looking at Austen.

"If you like," he replied, too much annoyed to conceal his vexation.

It was a dull grey afternoon, and everything looked brown and dingy. A cold breeze swept down the river, and made the girls glad to wrap their shawls close round their shoulders, though it was mid July. The river's winding course lay between lawns and meadows, shaded at places with splendid trees, at places carpeted with lilies. Every few yards offered some new beauty to Bee's appreciative eyes, whilst the mournfulness of the greyish light cast over all a pensive spell. Keeping to herself the strong impression of quiet, saddened loveliness the picturesque scenery produced on her, and the thoughts the wind, rustling over reeds and rushes, bred, Bourbachokátzouli found fault with everything. The river she called a nasty ditch, between two hedges of muddy reeds. Of the cold she complained bitterly, averring she was nearly frozen, and protesting she would never have come had she known how detestably uncomfortable a thing a boat was.

Austen, who sculled remarkably well and gracefully, and was not a little proud of it, was not much flattered to hear she hated to see any-one row. Men always looked awkward rowing, and seeing them strain at the oars made her shoulders ache. He had brought one of his terriers with him, simply because she once praised them, and the dog, mindful of her good-will, came and crouched herself at her feet. She requested immediately that "this dirty dog" might either be put ashore, or be in some other part of the boat. She hated dogs. If the brute were hers, she would then and there drop it, with a stone round its neck, into the river. Worse still, she tormented him with that most exasperating of all feminine tricks, a private and ostentatiously lively conversation between herself and her friend, concerning topics of which he knew nothing.

When Austen tried to join in this public tête-à-tête, Bee instantly became silent, gazing about her apathetically, and pretending to yawn, till she re-commenced talking to Alice. At last Austen gave up all attempts at conversation, and sculled on in silence, hoping she might at least rally him on his stupidity, in

which he was disappointed. In this unhappy way they went about two miles up the river. Then Alice, to whom Austen scarcely spoke, said she thought they ought to turn back. Of the three she was the one who really enjoyed the expedition least.

Hoping to please her lover, she had been steering all the time, not very successfully, and yet not very badly. On their way they crossed a sort of little rapid, where the water, running round a shingle-bed, covered when the river was full, fell some eight inches. Here, on returning, to steer the boat moving with the stream was, of course, more difficult than it had been to steer it on their way up, against the current. Alice felt nervous, and would have put down the yoke-lines, and left Austen to manage the boat, had she not wished to gain his approbation by showing him how she had profited by his instructions. Women are so anxious to please the men they love. When the boat got into the current, she made no sufficient allowance for the water catching the stern.

Austen said, "Keep her well off the bank, Miss Sarleigh," but said it too late. The stern of the boat swung heavily against the posts

and fagots placed to defend the bank of the river. No harm would have ensued had not the stump of a broken pile projected from the bank in a sloping position, an inch or more below the level of the water. Against the head of this the light boat, borne directly on it by the whole force of the stream, swung violently. Two planks, immediately below where the girls sat, were instantly stove in. The strength of the current, added to the boat's own way, was sufficient, however, to free her from the pile, and she drifted out into the open water below the rapid. By that time the water was up to the girls' ankles. The unexpected catastrophe immediately revealed the three occupants of the boat in their true characters.

"Mr. Austen, the boat is filling with water," said Miss Valettas.

Alice screamed, and started from her seat.

"*Sit down, Alice,*" exclaimed Miss Valettas, pulling her back.

"Confound it!" said Austen, as the water came forward to where he sat. "I thought I heard a plank go. That is your steering, Miss Sarleigh. You might have been more careful." Turning to Miss Valettas, he continued, sculling

the boat towards the bank as he spoke, "Don't be frightened, Miss Valettas. I can swim like a duck. When the boat sinks, put your hands on my shoulders, and hold on tight."

"And what is Miss Sarleigh to do?" asked Bourbachokátzouli, indignantly.

"Take her hands off you, unless she wishes to drown you."

Alice, pale as death and quivering with fear, held her friend's skirt with one hand, whilst with the other she clung round her waist. At Austen's words she loosened her hold, with a moment's agonized look at Bee, who was biting her lips. At the same time the water rose over the gunwale. The boat went down stern first. As she sank, the girls instinctively stood up, Alice screaming and clutching at Miss Valettas, who gently slipped her arm round her waist to reassure her.

Austen instantly struck out for the shore. Before he had made a second stroke, he realized Miss Valettas had not done as he bade her, and turned to look for her. She was standing, nearly up to her breast in water, supporting Alice. Where the boat had sunk, the water was not above four feet deep, and the girls

were standing in the sunken boat, as it lay on the bed of the stream.

"It is all right, dear, we are in our depth," Miss Valettas was saying. "Don't be frightened. I have you. You can't fall. Keep hold of me."

Pulling up her skirts with her free hand, she cautiously stepped over the side of the boat. Her foot sank in the mud, and the water instantly rose to her neck. Alice screamed.

"Don't be frightened, dear, there's no danger," said Bee. "Now step out after me. Take care how you step. Pull up your dress."

But Alice was clumsy, and trod on her skirts, and also caught her foot on the gunwale of the boat which rose from the bottom as soon as it was relieved of their weight. Had not Bourbachokátzouli held Alice firmly, she would have fallen. Then the girls struggled through the water and the mud, which was very deep nearer the bank, till they got to land. They had not more than four yards to go, but Alice was so frightened she could scarcely step, and constantly stumbled over her skirts, which she could not be made to understand she must hold up nearly to her knees, on account of the depth

of the mud. Bourbachokátzouli at last held them for her, taking her own and Alice's dress in one hand, and keeping the other round Alice's waist to encourage her. Of course, Austen had come to their assistance. He swam by their side, assuring them the water was deeper near the bank, which frightened Alice, and bothering Miss Valettas to let him get her ashore, till she turned round and said, angrily,

"Do keep out of the way, Mr. Austen."

At last they got out. Alice cut her ungloved hands on the coarse grass by the water-side. Losing her footing, too, just as she was emerging, she made a sudden lurch at Miss Valettas, by which she saved herself from falling, and all but pushed her friend under the dirty water. When they were at last both on dry land, out of breath, streaming from head to foot, draggled, indescribably dirty, their boots and stockings thickly coated with black mud, their skirts torn, and Alice's hand bleeding, Austen came ashore also. In his anxiety to do something showy in the way of assisting Miss Valettas, he had done nothing to help either of the girls.

"I am so glad you are safe," he said, coming



up to Bourbachokátzouli, "but I hoped to have had the privilege of saving your life."

"I'd rather drown!" she replied. She was labouring to get off her soaked gloves, in order more comfortably to wring the water out of Alice's skirts and her own. Seeing he stood watching her, she continued, after a few seconds, "Do go away, sir, do go away!"

"Cannot I be of any service to you?" he asked, remaining still, looking at her.

"And get us into another mess? Make us more ridiculous objects than we are now? No, thank you. Pray, sir, what are you staring at? What *are* you staring at? My skirts, filthy, are they not? And my hands, too, and my sleeves, and my feet." She lifted her wet skirts up to her ankles, and showed him her little feet all smothered in mud. "Miss Sarleigh is every bit as dirty, and has cut her hands too. And——"

"It is all Miss Sarleigh's fault," interrupted Austen, quickly, and loud enough for Alice to hear.

Bourbachokátzouli fixed her eyes on his, whilst her lips curled with an expression of venomous contempt. Without moving from

the ground where she stood facing him, she deliberately turned her back on him, and stood erect with folded arms till the sound of retreating steps assured her he was gone. Then she returned to Alice who was wringing her hands, and trying to master her sobs. Bee, who had no notion of their real cause, feared she was going to be hysterical, and, with difficulty, extracting a smelling-bottle from her drowned pocket, gave it her.

"No, no, Bee, I don't want that. I am sorry you spoke so to Mr. Austen, and turned your back on him so angrily. It *was* my fault, Bee. And I nearly drowned you, dear. And I never begged your pardon, nor thanked you for helping me. I was so frightened, and you are so brave, Bee."

"Nonsense, Alice, don't talk, wring out your skirts, and let us see if we cannot get shelter somewhere."

With each other's assistance the ladies did their best to make themselves, not presentable, that was not possible, but a little less ridiculous, and, having taken temporary refuge in the nearest house, sent a message to Ethel to come with dry clothes. Their host for the time, an

old officer, the autumn of whose life was devoted to the cultivation of pear-trees, made them drink some warm spirits and water, and put his whole house at their disposal. He delighted Bourbachokátzouli, to whom he took a great fancy, by promising to set afloat in Nanham such a version of their adventures as should make Mr. Austen regret the accident more even than they.

## CHAPTER XIV.

A LONG letter from Alice, the second since Miss Valettas' arrival at Nanham, informed Sarleigh, amongst other details of her visit, that she had assured Mrs. Sarleigh she was not engaged to him. Mrs. Sarleigh had told Alice, Alice Ethel. Ethel believed it. Mrs. Sarleigh partly believed it. Alice herself had been very much surprised, and had spoken to Bee about it, and felt hurt and shocked at the way Bee spoke on the subject. The deacon was sorry Miss Valettas had spoken so plainly, but the various shades of disbelief with which the statement had been received seemed to him encouraging, inasmuch as they showed other people thought his ultimate success was possible. Had he heard the energetic disclaimer as it fell from Bourbachokátzouli's lips, his thoughts would

have been different. But the most carefully-written letter conveys a vague impression of an actual occurrence with all its significant circumstances and momentous minutiae. That Bee and he were not engaged was no news to Sarleigh. She had refused him. But that was as much in play as in earnest, and before she had gone to stay with his friends in the country.

That he had little hope of joining her there vexed him much more. To get three weeks holiday, and spend it at home, whilst she was at Nanham, was the most cherished of his plans. Then, having her all to himself, and far enough away from Montenotte, he would find it easy to engage her affections, and arrange a speedy wedding, the beginning of an Elysian life. The sudden dangerous illness of his fellow-curate's father, necessitating the son's immediate attendance at his bedside, compelled Mr. Couton to request Sarleigh to postpone his holidays till he could be better spared. The deacon demurred, whereat the vicar, who had no idea what tender interests his curate supposed to be at stake, was surprised and inclined to be angry. He gave the cleric of nine months' standing to understand he was mistaken, if he supposed

young men in any profession could always have a month's holiday when they pleased. He formed, too, a low estimate of Sarleigh's future professional success from the readiness with which the latter hinted there was such a thing as giving up a curacy "not worth sticking to." The last awkward expression escaped the deacon's lips in the height of his nervousness at having to dispute with the vicar. Poor man! he was thinking to himself there were many curacies but only one Bourbachokátzouli Valettas. In the end he was overpersuaded by an allusion to his fellow-curate's trouble, and an appeal to his generosity, to spare the man by his father's death-bed the additional distress of knowing he was wanted elsewhere.

Mr. Couton, appeased, promised Sarleigh should go the very day the other curate returned, and, if possible, should also have two or three days at an early date for a brief visit to Nanham. This promise Mr. Couton forgot. Sarleigh patiently waited a day or two, not exactly hoping the old gentleman in question would make haste with his dying, but conscious that his son's early return to town would be satisfactory. Then, sensible that he was losing

priceless opportunities, he proceeded to make what capital he could out of his misfortunes. He wrote a long letter to Alice to say he was very disappointed he could not come to Nanham, and that nothing but a sense of a great duty would have kept him away whilst Miss Valettas was there. He sent Miss Valettas herself a carefully-composed note to the same effect. Possessed by an uncomfortable notion that she would think herself slighted if he dared to put the welfare of the whole human race on a level with the least of her whims, he represented alike, in the strongest terms, his sympathy with his suffering fellow-curate, the overwhelming sense of duty that retained him in town, and his personal desire to be with her at Nanham. So the letter, though brief, contradicted itself in a kind of triangular way that much amused the lady to whom it was addressed. She, having anticipated little pleasure from his coming, was not sorry to hear it was improbable. She wrote a bright little answer, concluded with "you know your sense of duty, and your kindness to your fellow-curate must command my respect." "And my gratitude too, mon ami, if it prevents

your coming down here," she added in thought, whilst signing herself "Yours sincerely, B. V." Her Greek initials, *M. B.*, were reserved for a more favoured correspondent.

This honied reply emboldened Sarleigh to venture before long on another letter, followed by many more. These letters grew longer and bolder as day succeeded day. His mother and sisters took particular note of their size and frequency. Bourbachokátzouli only replied once more, with half a dozen words, requesting no more letters might be sent, and threatening to return them unopened. The request was not complied with, for reasons detailed in Sarleigh's immediate and passionate reply, which Miss Valettas returned as she said. Sarleigh wrote again. This letter was not sent back, but neither was it, nor those that followed it read. But of this anon.

Along with Miss Valettas' welcome note arrived another from Alice, the tone of which may be guessed from one ominous sentence. "Mother has been a good deal hurt at your having written as if you regretted postponing your visit to us only on account of Miss Valettas being here. I think mother right, though,



of course, if this is how you feel, we don't wish you to pretend otherwise." This was rather hard on the poor cleric. At Nanham, where the days passed so gaily and brightly, they had no idea how heavily the same days lagged with him, plodding on through the dull routine of recurring duties, and trying in vain to sun himself in the reflection of their pleasures by reading good-natured Alice's long letters, or composing equally long unanswered ones to Miss Valettas. In the space of three dreary weeks the only event that had any relation to her of whom he constantly thought, the only occurrence of any interest to the reader of this story, was one that gave the deacon little cause for gratification.

It was Saturday morning. He wanted to finish his sermon, and had just recovered, after a good deal of thought, the thread of an argument, abruptly interrupted on Thursday evening, which he had found it impossible to gather from what was already written. Mrs. Tansley called, and said she must see Mr. Sarleigh, on most particular business and immediately. The curate consented to see Mrs. Tansley, and, with intent to get rid of her as

soon as possible, came out into the hall to speak to her.

"Good morning, Mr. Sarleigh, good morning. How do you do? I hope you are quite well. I wanted to see you very particularly about something most important. I had better come and see you at once, I thought, because this is very important indeed, and I wanted to see you at once particularly about it."

As he did not invite her into his room, she continued, "It really is most important, something about Miss Valettas, that young woman you know, Mr. Sarleigh."

The last piece of information conveyed in a stage whisper, and accompanied by most significant nods, made the deacon blush, and instantly changed the whole aspect of the interview. Mrs. Tansley was invited into the curate's study, and commenced to explain her business.

First she tried to extract from him all *he* knew about Miss Valettas. He was too wary for this, and told her nothing, which led her to conclude he knew more than he chose to confess. She then proceeded to tell him all *she* knew. It was not much, but to poor Sar-

leigh of painful interest. Owing to Mrs. Tansley's predilection for repeating everything some dozen times, and entering into many irrelevant details, and curiously inapt illustrations drawn from her own experiences in life, much time was consumed in narrating very little. It altogether amounted to this :

She, Mrs. Tansley, liked to get to the bottom of things, and intended to get to the bottom of the history of that girl Miss Valettas. She had inquired about Sarleigh's inquiries in Clayton Street, and knew what the people had told him, which she repeated to him with astonishing accuracy. It is marvellous how an empty head can retain a little thing. She had made further inquiries, and discovered things which he had not. Miss Valettas had lodgings at the Hudsons in a dirty back room ten days, and left some few things there, which the Hudsons sold, pocketing the money, though she had paid the rent. This was why the Hudsons had said she had not been there. The Hudsons were low, unprincipled people. This might be concluded from their having for the last three months washed themselves and their children in the tank that belonged to a house in the next

street, which tank was conveniently reached from their garret window. Miss Valettas gave a working man who lodged in the house half-a-crown to steal the key from the Hudsons' bed-room, and let her out of the house before they were awake. Her reason for leaving was to escape being discovered by a foreigner, who had the day before called, and inquired if she lived there, and who said he should return on the morrow. On calling again he found her gone. The foreigner had not been seen since. This information Mrs. Tansley had procured, for half-a-crown, from Joe Jiggings, the young man who took the half-crown from Miss Valettas to steal the key. He was a good-looking young man, and only laughed when Mrs. Tansley asked him what he thought of Miss Valettas.

No man can be taken by surprise for three hours and a quarter, the time this good lady had consumed in telling her story. If she could have narrated it concisely, and suddenly confronted the deacon with the ugly certainties it contained, she would have been able, on the many future occasions of its repetition, to add as an interesting conclusion its strange effect

on Mr. Sarleigh. But having had, during her endless rhodomontade, ample time to wonder, to weigh, and, if not to disbelieve, to see how he could discredit her news, when she paused at last, the cleric asked, with well-studied calmness, "And is that all?"

"All, yes. That's all. And a pretty all, I think, don't you? Yes, that's all. At least, that is so far as—that is all, yes, that is all, Mr. Sarleigh."

Then said Sarleigh, "I don't believe a word of it."

Did Mr. Sarleigh mean she did not speak the truth? Did he mean she was a liar, an untruthful person? Did he suppose she cared what he thought? Did he suppose she believed what he said? Did he suppose she was going to be spoken to like that? Did he suppose she was going to be humbugged? Did he suppose she was going to stand it? Did he know who she was? Did he know she was as good as he was? Did he know her father was an officer in the Queen's Army, and her mother "quite a lady"? Did he know that she kept a cook and a housemaid, as well as a boy to clean the boots? And, if so, what did he mean by it?

Sarleigh humbly remarked that he meant Joe Jiggings would say anything for half-a-crown, and that he himself wanted to finish his sermon.

So Mrs. Tansley, with an intensely haughty air, said, "Oh! certainly, I did not know I was intruding, certainly, pray finish your sermon. I hope I have not taken up your time."

Then she went.

Sarleigh sat down to his sermon. He swung his chair back on its hinder legs, and bit the end of his pen.

"Poor Bee," he said, "in that den! I hope it is not true."

He might well say "poor Bee," for whilst she was at play in the country, the net was closing round her very fast.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.











